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P O E M S

AND

P L A Y S.

V O L. III.



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P L A Y S,

By WILLIAM HAYLEY, Esq.

IN SIX VOLUMES.

V O L. III.

L O N D O N:

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X

A N
E S S A Y
O N
E P I C P O E T R Y;

IN FIVE EPISTLES TO THE REV.^D M.^R MASON.

W I T H
N O T E S.

Vatibus addere calcar
Ut studio majore petant Helicon virentem. HOR.

EPISTLE THE FIRST.

A R G U M E N T

OF THE FIRST EPISTLE.

Introduction.—Design of the Poem to remove prejudices which obstruct the cultivation of Epic writing.—Origin of Poetry.—Honors paid to its infancy.—Homer the first Poet remaining.—Difficulty of the question why he had no Successor in Greece.—Remark of a celebrated Writer, that as Criticism flourishes Poetry declines.—Defence of Critics.—Danger of a bigoted acquiescence in critical Systems—and of a Poet's criticising his own works.—Advantages of Friendship and Study of the higher Poets.

A N
E S S A Y
O N
E P I C P O E T R Y.

E P I S T L E · I.

PERISH that critic pride, which oft has hurl'd
Its empty thunders o'er the Epic world ;
Which, eager to extend its mimic reign,
Would bind free Fancy in a servile chain ;
With papal rage the eye of Genius blind,
And bar the gates of Glory on the mind !

5

4 ESSAY ON EPIC POETRY. EP. I.

Such dark decrees have letter'd Bigots penn'd *,
 • Yet seiz'd that honor'd name, the Poet's Friend.
 But Learning from her page their laws will blot ;
 Scorn'd be their arrogance ! their name forgot ! 10
 Th' indignant Bard, abhorring base controul,
 Seeks the just Critic of congenial soul.
 Say ! MASON, Judge and Master of the Lyre !
 Harmonious Chief of Britain's living Choir,
 Say ! wilt Thou listen to his weaker strains, 15
 Who pants to range round Fancy's rich domains ;
 To vindicate her empire, and disown
 Proud System, seated on her injur'd throne ?
 Come ! while thy Muse, contented with applause,
 Gives to her graceful song a little pause, 20
 Enjoying triumphs past ; at leisure laid
 In thy sweet Garden's variegated shade,
 Or fondly hanging on some favorite Oak
 That Harp, whose notes the fate of Mona spoke,

* Ver. 7. See NOTE I.

EP. I. ESSAY ON EPIC POETRY. 5

Strung by the sacred Druid's social band, 25
And wisely trusted to thy kindred hand !
Come ! for thy liberal and ingenuous heart
Can aid a Brother in this magic art ;
Let us, and Freedom be our guide, explore
The highest province of poetic lore, 30
Free the young Bard from that oppressive awe,
Which feels Opinion's rule as Reason's law,
And from his spirit bid vain fears depart,
Of weaken'd Nature and exhausted Art !
Phantoms ! that literary spleen conceives ! 35
Dullness adopts, and Indolence believes !
While with advent'rous step we wind along
Th' expansive regions of Heroic song,
From different sources let our search explain
Why few the Chieftains of this wide domain. 40
Haply, inspiriting poetic youth,
Our verse may prove this animating truth,
That Poesy's sublime, neglected field
May still new laurels to Ambition yield ;

6 ESSAY ON EPIC POETRY. EP. I.

Her Epic trumpet, in a modern hand, 45
 Still make the spirit glow, the heart expand.
 Be such our doctrine ! our enlivening aim
 The Muse's honor, and our Country's fame !

 Thou first and fairest of the social Arts !
 Sovereign of liberal souls, and feeling hearts ! 50
 If, in devotion to thy heavenly charms,
 I clasp'd thy altar with my infant arms,
 For thee neglected the wide field of wealth,
 The toils of int'rest, and the sports of health,—
 Enchanting Poesy ! that zeal repay 55
 With powers to sing thy universal sway !
 To trace thy progress from thy distant birth,
 Heaven's pure descendant ! dear delight of Earth !
 Charm of all regions ! to no age confin'd !
 The prime ennobler of th' aspiring mind ! 60

 Nor will thy dignity, sweet Power ! disdain
 What Fiction utters in her idle strain,
 Thy sportive Friend ! who, mocking solemn Truth,
 Tells her fond tales of thy untutor'd youth.

As

EP. I. ESSAY ON EPIC POETRY. 7

As wrong'd Latona (so her tale begins) 65

To Delphos travell'd with her youthful twins;

Th' envenom'd Python, with terrific sway,

Cross'd the fair Goddess in her destin'd way :

The heavenly parent, in the wild alarm,

Her little Dian in her anxious arm, 70

High on a stone, which she in terror trod,

Cried to her filial guard, the Archer God,

Bidding with force, that spoke the Mother's heart,

Her young Apollo launch his ready dart ;

In measur'd sounds her rapid mandate flow'd, 75

The first foundation of the future Ode !

Thus, at their banquets, fabling Greeks rehearse *

The fancied origin of sacred Verse :

And though cold Reason may with scorn assail,

Or turn contemptuous from their simple tale, 80

Yet, Poesy ! thy sister Art may stoop

From this weak sketch to paint th' impassion'd group.

* Ver. 77. See NOTE II.

Though taste refin'd to modern Verse deny
The hacknied pageants of the Pagan sky,
Their sinking radiance still the Canvass warms, 85
Painting still glories in their graceful forms ;
Nor canst thou envy, if the world agree
To grant thy Sister claims denied to thee ;
For thee, the happier Art ! the elder-born !
Superior rights and dearer charms adorn : 90
Confin'd she catches, with observance keen,
Her single moment of the changeful scene ;
But thou, endu'd with energy sublime,
Unquestion'd arbiter of space and time !
Canst join the distant, the unknown create, 95
And, while Existence yields thee all her state,
On the astonish'd mind profusely pour
Myriads of forms, that Fancy must adore.
Yet of thy boundless power the dearest part
Is firm possession of the feeling Heart : 100
No progeny of Chance, by Labor taught,
No slow-form'd creature of scholastic thought,

The

EP. I. ESSAY ON EPIC POETRY.

The child of Passion thou ! thy lyre she strung,
To her parental notes she tun'd thy tongue ;
Gave thee her boldest swell, her softest tone, 105
And made the compass of her voice thy own.

To Admiration, source of joy refin'd !
Chaste, lovely mover of the simple mind !
To her, though sceptics, in their pride, declaim,
With many an insult, on her injur'd name ; 110
To her, sweet Poesy ! we owe thy birth,
Thou first encomiast of the fruitful Earth !
By her inspir'd, the earliest mortal found
The ear-delighting charm of measur'd sound ;
He hail'd the Maker of a world so fair, 115
And the first accent of his song was prayer.
O, most attractive of those airy Powers,
Who most illuminate Man's chequer'd hours !
Is there an Art, in all the group divine,
Whose dawn of Being must not yield to thine ? 120
Religion's self, whose provident controul
Takes from fierce Man his anarchy of soul,

She

She o'er thy youth with fond affection hung,
And borrow'd music from thy infant tongue.

Law, sterner Law, whose potent voice imprest 125
Severest terror on the human breast,

With thy fresh flow'rs her awful figure crown'd,
And spoke her mandate in thy softer sound.

E'en cold Philosophy, whom later days
Saw thy mean rival, envious of thy praise ; 130

Who clos'd against thee her ungrateful arms,
And urg'd her Plato to defame thy charms ;

She from thy childhood gain'd no fruitless aid,
From thee she learnt her talent to persuade.

Gay Nature view'd thee with a smiling glance, 135
The Graces round thee fram'd the frolic dance :

And well might festive Joy thy favor court ;
Thy song turn'd strife to peace, and toil to sport.

Exhausted Vigor at thy voice reviv'd,

And Mirth from thee her dearest charm deriv'd. 140
Triumphant Love, in thy alliance blest,

Enlarg'd his empire o'er the gentle breast ;

His

EP. I. ESSAY ON EPIC POETRY. 11

His torch assum'd new lustre from thy breath,
And his clear flame defied the clouds of death.
But of the splendid train, who felt thy sway, 145

Or drew existence from thy vital ray,
Glory, with fondest zeal, proclaim'd thy might,
And hail'd thee victor of oblivious Night.

Her martial trumpet to thy hand she gave,
At once to quicken, and reward the Brave : 150

It sounds—his blood the kindling Hero pays,
A cheap and ready price for thy eternal praise !
Tho' selfish Fear th' immortal strain deride,
And mock the Warrior's wish as frantic pride !

Ye gallant, hapless Dead of distant time, 155
Whose fame has perish'd unembalm'd in rhyme,
As thro' the desert air your ashes fly,
In Fancy's ear the nameless atoms cry,

“ To us, unhappy ! cruel Fates refuse
“ The well-earn'd record of th' applauding Muse.”

Blest are those Chiefs, who, blazon'd on her roll, 161
Still waken virtue in each kindred soul ;

Their

Their bright existence still on earth prolong,
And shine for ever in the deathless song.

Yet oft Oblivion, in a treacherous shade, 165
Has sunk the tuneful rites to Valor paid;
Her palsied lips refusing to rehearse
The sacred, old, traditionary verse.

As well the curious eye, with keen desire,
Might hope to catch that spark of vital fire, 170
Which first thro' Chaos shot a sudden light,
And quicken'd Nature in its transient flight;
As the fond ear to catch the fleeting note,
Which on the ravish'd air was heard to float,
When first the Muse her Epic strain began, 175
And every list'ning Chief grew more than Man.

But, as the Ruler of the new-born day
From Chaos rose, in glory's rich array;
So from deep shades, impenetrably strong,
That shroud the darken'd world of antient song, 180
Bright HOMER bursts, magnificently clear,
The solar Lord of that poetic sphere;

Before

I. EP. I. ESSAY ON EPIC POETRY. 13

Before whose blaze, in wide luxuriance spread,
Each Grecian Star hides his diminish'd head ;
Whose beams departed yet enchant the sight, 185
In Latium's softer, chaste, reflected light.

Say ye ! whose curious philosophic eye
Searches the depth where Nature's secrets lie ;
Ye, who can tell how her capricious fit
Directs the flow and ebb of human wit, 190
And why, obedient to her quick command,
Spring-tides of Genius now enrich her fav'rite land,
Now sink, by her to different climes assign'd,
And only leave some worthless weeds behind !
Say ! why in Greece, unrival'd and alone, 195
The Sovereign Poet grac'd his Epic throne ?
Why did the realm that echoed his renown,
Produce no kindred heir to claim his crown ?
If, as the liberal mind delights to think,
Fancy's rich flow'rs their vital essence drink 200
From Liberty's pure streams, that largely roll
Their quick'ning virtue thro' the Poet's soul ;
Why,

Why, in the period when this Friend of Earth
 Made Greece the model of heroic worth,
 And saw her votaries act, beneath her sway, 205
 Scenes more sublime than Fiction can display,
 Why did the Epic Muse's silent lyre *
 Shrink from those feats that summon'd all her fire ?
 Or if, as courtly Theorists maintain,
 The Muses revel in a Monarch's reign ; 210
 Why, when young Ammon's soul, athirst for fame,
 Call'd every Art to celebrated his name ;
 When ready Painting, at his sovereign nod,
 With awful thunder arm'd this mimic God ;
 Why did coy Poesy, tho' fondly woo'd, 215
 Refuse that dearer smile for which he sued,
 And see him shed, in martial Honor's bloom,
 The tear of envy on Achilles' tomb ?

In vain would Reason those nice questions solve,
 Which the fine play of mental powers involve : 220

* Ver. 207. See NOTE III.

I. EP. I. ESSAY ON EPIC POETRY. 15

In Bards of ancient time, with genius fraught,
 What mind can trace how thought engender'd thought,
 How little hints awak'd the large design,
 And subtle Fancy spun her variegated line?
 Yet sober Critics, of no vulgar note, 225
 But such as Learning's sons are proud to quote,
 The progress of Homeric verse explain,
 As if their souls had lodg'd in Homer's brain.
 Laughs not the spirit of poetic frame,
 However slightly warm'd by Fancy's flame, 230
 When grave Bossu by System's studied laws *
 The Grecian Bard's ideal picture draws,
 And wisely tells us, that his Song arose
 As the good Parson's quiet Sermon grows;
 Who, while his easy thoughts no pressure find 235
 From hosts of images that croud the mind,
 First calmly settles on some moral text,
 Then creeps—from one division—to the next?

* Ver. 231. See NOTE IV.

Nor, if poetic minds more slowly drudge
 Thro' the cold comments of this Gallic judge, 240
 Will their indignant spirit less deride
 That subtle Pedant's more presumptive pride,
 Whose bloated page, with arrogance replete,
 Imputes to VIRGIL his own dark conceit ; *
 And from the tortur'd Poet dares to draw 245
 That latent sense, which HORACE never saw ;
 Which, if on solid proof more strongly built,
 Must brand the injur'd Bard with impious guilt.
 While such Dictators their vain efforts waste
 In the dark visions of distemper'd Taste, 250
 Let us that pleasing, happier light pursue,
 Which beams benignant from the milder few,
 Who, justly conscious of the doubts that start
 In all nice questions on each finer Art,
 With modest doubt assign each likely cause, 255
 But dare to dictate no decisive laws.

* Ver. 244. See NOTE V.

'Tis said by one, who, with this candid claim, *
Has gain'd no fading wreath of Critic fame,
Who, fondly list'ning to her various rhyme,
Has mark'd the Muse's step thro' many a clime ; 260
That, where the settled Rules of Writing spread,
Where Learning's code of Critic Law is read,
Tho' other treasures deck th' enlighten'd shore,
The germs of Fancy ripen there no more.
Are Critics then, that bold, imperious tribe ! 265
The Guards of Genius, who his path prescribe ;
Are they like Vifirs in an Eastern court,
Who sap the very power they should support ?
Whose specious wiles the royal mind unnerve,
And sink the monarch they pretend to serve. 270
No ! of their value higher far I deem ;
And prize their useful toil with fond esteem.
When LOWTH's firm spirit leads him to explore
The hallow'd confines of Hebraic lore ;

* Ver. 257. See NOTE VI.

When his free pages, luminous and bold, 275
The glorious end of Poesy unfold,
Assert her powers, her dignity defend,
And speak her, as she is, fair Freedom's friend ;
When thus he shines his mitred Peers above,
I view his warmth with reverential love ; 280
Proud, if my verse may catch reflected light
From the rich splendor of a mind so bright.

Blest be the names, to no vain system tied,
Who render Learning's blaze an useful guide,
A friendly beacon, rais'd on high to teach 285
The wand'ring bark to shun the shallow beach.
But O ! ye noble, and aspiring few,
Whose ardent souls poetic fame pursue,
Ye, on whom smiling Heaven, perfection's source,
Seems to bestow unlimitable force, 290
The inborn vigor of your souls defend,
Nor lean too fondly on the firmest friend !
Genius may sink on Criticism's breast,
By weak dependance on her truth oppress,

EP. I. ESSAY ON EPIC POETRY. 19

Sleep on her lap, and stretch his lifeless length, 295

Shorn by her soothing hand of all his strength.

Thou wilt not, MASON ! thou, whose generous heart
Must feel that Freedom is the soul of Art,

Thou wilt not hold me arrogant or vain,

If I advise the young poetic train 300

To deem infallible no Critic's word ;

Not e'en the dictates of thy Attic HURD :

No ! not the Stagyrte's unquestion'd page,

The Sire of Critics, sanctified by age !

The noblest minds, with solid reason blest, 305

Who feel that faculty above the rest,

Who argue on those arts they never try,

Exalt that Reason they so oft apply,

Till in its pride, with tyrannous controul,

It crush the kindred talents of the soul ; 310

And hence, in every Art, will systems rise,

Which Fancy must survey with angry eyes ;

And at the lightning of her scornful smile,

In frequent ruin sinks the labor'd pile.

How oft, my ROMNEY ! have I known thy vein 315
 Swell with indignant heat and gen'rous pain,
 To hear, in terms both arrogant and tame,
 Some reas'ning Pedant on thy Art declaim :
 Its laws and limits when his sovereign taste
 With firm precision has minutely trac'd, 320
 And in the close of a decisive speech
 Pronounc'd some point beyond the Pencil's reach,
 How has thy Genius, by one rapid stroke,
 Refuted all the sapient things he spoke !
 Thy Canvass placing, in the clearest light, 325
 His own Impossible before his sight !
 O might the Bard who loves thy mental fire,
 Who to thy fame attun'd his early lyre,
 Learn from thy Genius, when dull Fops decide,
 So to refute their systematic pride ! 330
 Let him, at least, succeeding Poets warn
 To view the Pedant's lore with doubt, or scorn,
 And e'en to question, with a spirit free,
 Establish'd Critics of the first degree !

Among

EP. I. ESSAY ON EPIC POETRY. 21

Among the names that Judgment loves to praise, 335
The pride of ancient, or of modern days ;
What Laws of Poesy can Learning shew
Above the Critic song of sage DESPREAUX ?
His fancy elegant, his judgment nice,
His method easy, and his style concise ; 340
The Bard of Reason, with her vigor fraught,
Her purest doctrine he divinely taught ;
Nor taught in vain ! His precept clear and chaste
Reform'd the errors of corrupted Taste ;
And French Imagination, who was bit 345
By that Tarantula, distorted Wit,
Ceasing her antic gambols to rehearse,
Blest the pure magic of his healing verse :
With his loud fame applauding Europe rung,
And his just praise a rival Poet sung. 350
Yet, had this Friend of Verse-devoted Youth,
This tuneful Teacher of Poetic truth,
Had he but chanc'd his doctrine to diffuse
Ere Milton commun'd with his sacred Muse ;

And could that English, self-dependant soul, 355

Born with such energy as mocks controul,

Could his high spirit, with submissive awe,

Have stoop'd to listen to a Gallic Law ;

His hallow'd subject, by that Law forbid *,

Might still have laid in silent darkness hid, 360

And, this bright Sun not rising in our sphere,

HOMER had wanted still his true compeer.

From hence let Genius to himself be just,

Hence learn, ye Bards, a liberal distrust ;

Whene'er 'tis said, by System's haughty Son, 365

That what He cannot do, can ne'er be done,

'Tis Fancy's right th' exalted throne to press,

Whose height proud System can but blindly guess,

Springs, whose existence she denies, unlock,

And call rich torrents from the flinty rock. 370

Let the true Poet, who would build a name

In noble rivalry of antient fame,

* Ver, 359. See NOTE VII.

When he would plan, to triumph over Time,
 The splendid fabric of his lofty rhyme,
 Let him the pride of Constantine assume, 375
 Th' imperial Founder of the second Rome,
 Who scorn'd all limits to his work assign'd, *
 Save by th' inspiring God who rul'd his mind;
 Or, like the fabled † Jove, to ascertain
 The doubtful confines of his wide domain, 380
 Two Eagles let him send of equal wing,
 Whose different flight may form a perfect ring,
 And, at the point where Sense and Fancy meet,
 There safely bold, and though sublime discreet,
 His fame's foundation let him firmly lay, 385
 Nor dread the danger of disputed sway !

* Ver. 377. See NOTE VIII.

† Jupiter, ut perhibent, spatium quum discere vellet

Naturæ, regni nescius ipse sui,

Armigeros utrimque duos æqualibus alis

Misit ab Eois Occiduisque plagis.

Parnassus geminos fertur junxisse volatus;

Contulit alternas Pythius axis aves. CLAUDIAN.

Yet, if the Bard to glory must aspire
By free exertion of unborrow'd fire,
Nor, like the Classic Bigot, vainly deem
No modern Muse can challenge just esteem, 390
Unless her robe in every fold be prest
To fall precisely like the Grecian vest ;
If the blind notion he must boldly shun,
That Beauty's countless forms are only one,
And not, when Fancy, from her magic hoard, 395
Would blindly bring him treasures unexplor'd,
Snap her light wand, and force her hand to bear
The heavier Compass, and the formal Square ;
Let him no less their dangerous pride decline,
Who singly criticise their own design. 400
In that nice toil what various perils lurk !
Not Pride alone may mar the needful work ;
But foes more common to the feeling nerve,
Where Taste and Genius dwell with coy Reserve,
The sickly Doubt, with modest weakness fraught, 405
The languid Tedium of o'erlabour'd thought,

The

The Pain to feel the growing work behind
The finish'd model in the forming mind ;
These foes, that oft the Poet's bosom pierce,
These ! that condemn'd to fire Virgilian Verse, 410
Prove that the Bard, a bold, yet trembling elf,
Should find a Critic firmer than himself.
But what fine Spirit will assume the Judge,
Patient thro' all this irksome toil to drudge ?
'Tis here, O Friendship ! here thy glories shine ; 415
The hard, th' important task is only thine ;
For thou alone canst all the powers unite,
That justly make it thy peculiar right :
Thine the fixt eye, which at no foible winks ;
Thine the warm zeal, which utters all it thinks, 420
In those sweet tones, that hasty Spleen disarm,
That give to painful Truth a winning charm,
And the quick hand of list'ning Genius teach,
To grasp that excellence he burns to reach :
Thou Sweet subduer of all mental strife !
Thou Source of vigor ! thou Support of life !

425

Nor

Nor Art nor Science could delight or live,
Without that energy thy counsels give :
Genius himself must sink in dumb despair,
Unblest, uncherish'd by thy cheering care. 430

Nor let the Bard, elate with youthful fire,
When Fancy to his hand presents the lyre,
When her strong plumes his soaring spirit lift,
When Friendship, Heaven's more high and holy gift,
With zeal angelic prompts his daring flight, 435

And round him darts her doubt-dispelling light ;
Let him not then, by Vanity betray'd,

Look with unjust contempt on Learning's aid !

But, as th' advent'rous Seaman, to attain

That bright renown which great Discoverers gain,

Consults the conduct of each gallant name, 441

Who sail'd before him in that chace of Fame,

Reviews, with frequent glance, their useful chart,

Marks all their aims, and fathoms all their art,

So let the Poet trace *their* happy course 445

So bravely emulate *their* mental force,

Whose

Whose daring souls, from many a different clime,
 Have nobly ventur'd on the sea of Rhyme !
 Led by no fear, his swelling sail to slack,
 Let him, with eager eyes, pursue the track ; 450
 Not like a Pirate, with insidious views
 To plunder every vessel he pursues,
 But with just hope to find yet farther shores,
 And pass each rival he almost adores !

END OF THE FIRST EPISTLE.

EPISTLE

THE ESSAY ON THE THEORY

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T H E S E C O N D .

A R G U M E N T

OF THE SECOND EPISTLE.

Character of Antient Poets—Homer—Apollonius Rhodius—Virgil—Lucan.

A N
E S S A Y
O N
E P I C P O E T R Y.

E P I S T L E II.

HAIL, mighty Father of the Epic line,
Thou vast, prolific, intellectual Mine,
Whence veins of antient and of modern gold,
The wealth of each poetic world, have roll'd !
Great Bard of Greece, whose ever-during Verse
All ages venerate, all tongues rehearse ;

5
Could

Cou'd blind idolatry be justly paid
 To aught of mental power by man display'd,
 To thee, thou Sire of soul-exalting Song,
 That boundless worship might to thee belong ; 10
 For, as thy Jove, on his Olympian throne,
 In his unrivall'd sway exults alone,
 Commanding Nature by his awful nod,
 In high seclusion from each humbler God ;
 So shines thy Genius thro' the cloud of years, 15
 Exalted far above thy Pagan peers
 By the rich splendor of creative fire,
 And the deep thunder of thy martial lyre ;
 The conscious world confesses thy controul,
 And hails thee Sovereign of the kindling soul. 20

Yet, could thy mortal shape revisit earth,
 How would it move, great Bard ! thy scornful mirth,
 To hear vain Pedants to thy Verse assign
 Scholastic thoughts that never could be thine ;
 To hear the quaint conceits of modern Pride 25
 Blaspheme thy Fancy and thy Taste deride ?

When

EP. II. ESSAY ON EPIC POETRY. 33

When thus in Vanity's capricious fit,
We see thy fame traduc'd by Gallic wit, *
We see a Dwarf, who dares his foot to rest
On a recumbent Giant's ample chest, 30
And, lifting his pert form to public sight,
Boasts, like a child, his own superior height.
But neither envious Wit's malignant craft,
Tho' arm'd with Ridicule's envenom'd shaft,
Nor fickle Fashion's more tyrannic sway, 35
Whose varying voice the sons of Earth obey,
Can shake the solid base of thy renown,
Or blast the verdure of thy Laurel crown.
Tho' Time, who from his many-colour'd wings,
Scatters ten thousand shades o'er human things, 40
Has wrought unnumber'd changes since thy birth,
And given new features to the face of earth ;
Tho' all thy Gods who shook the starry pole,
Unquestion'd Rulers of the Pagan soul,

* Ver. 28. See NOTE I.

Are fallen with their fanes, in ruin hurl'd, 45
 Their worship vanish'd from th' enlighten'd world ;
 Still its immortal force thy Song retains,
 Still rules obedient man and fires his glowing veins ;
 For Nature's self, that great and constant power,
 One and the same thro' every changing hour, 50
 Gave thee each secret of her reign to pierce,
 And stamp'd her signet on thy sacred Verse ;
 That awful signet, whose imperial sway
 No age disputes, no regions disobey ;
 For at its sight the subject passions start, 55
 And open all the passes of the heart.

'Twas Nature taught thy Genius to display
 That host of Characters who grace thy lay ;
 So richly varied and so vast the store,
 Her plastic hand can hardly model more : 60

'Twas Nature, noblest of poetic Guides,
 Gave thee thy flowing Verse, whose copious tides
 Gushing luxuriant from high Fancy's source,
 By no vain art diverted in their course,

EP. II. ESSAY ON EPIC POETRY. 35

With splendid ease, with simple grandeur roll, 65
Spread their free wealth, and fertilize the soul.

There are, whom blind and erring zeal betrays
To wound thy Genius with ill-judging praise ;
Who rashly deem thee of all Arts the fire,
Who draw dull smoke from thy resplendent fire, 70
Pretend thy fancied Miracles to pierce,
And form quaint riddles of thy clearest Verse ;
Blind to those brighter charms and purer worth,
Which make thy Lays the lasting joy of earth.
For why has every age with fond acclaim 75
Swell'd the loud note of thy increasing fame ?
Not that cold Study may from thee deduce
Vain codes of mystic lore and laws abstruse ;
But that thy Song presents, like solar light,
A world in action to th' enraptur'd sight ; 80
That, with a force beyond th' enervate rules
Of tame Philosophy's pedantic Schools,
Thy living Images instruct mankind,
Mould the just heart, and fire th' heroic mind.

E'en SOCRATES himself, that purest Sage, * 85

Imbib'd his Wisdom from thy moral page ;
 And haply Greece, the Wonder of the Earth
 For feats of martial fire and civic worth,
 That glorious Land, of noblest minds the nurse,
 Owes her unrivall'd race to thy inspiring Verse ; 90

For O, what Greek, who in his youthful vein
 Had felt thy soul-invigorating strain,
 Who that had caught, amid the festive throng,
 The public lesson of thy patriot Song,
 Could ever cease to feel his bosom swell 95
 With zeal to dare, and passion to excel.

In thee thy grateful country justly prais'd
 The noblest Teacher of the tribes she rais'd ;
 Thy voice, which doubly gave her fame to last,
 Form'd future Heroes, while it sung the past. 100

What deep regret thy fond admirers feel,
 That mythologic clouds thy life conceal ;

* Ver. 85. See NOTE II.

EP. II. ESSAY ON EPIC POETRY. 37

That, like a distant God, thou'rt darkly shewn,
Felt in thy Works, but in Thyself unknown !
Perchance the shades that hide thy mortal days 105
From keen Affection's disappointed gaze,
And that Idolatry, so fondly proud,
With which thy Country to thy genius bow'd,
Might form the cause why, kindling with thy fire,
No Grecian rival struck thy Epic lyre ; 110
Perchance, not seeing how thy steps were train'd,
How they the summit of Parnassus gain'd,
On thy oppressive Glory's flaming pride
Young Emulation gaz'd, and gazing died.

The Muses of the Attic Stage impart 115
To many a Votary their kindred art ;
And she who bids the Theban Eagle bear
Her lyric thunder thro' the stormy air,
How high soe'er she leads his daring flight, *
Guides his bold rivals to an equal height. 120

* Ver. 119. See NOTE III.

Of all the Grecian Bards in Glory's race,
 'Tis thine alone, by thy unequall'd pace,
 To reach the goal with loud applause, and hear
 No step approaching thine, no rival near.
 Yet may not Judgment, with severe disdain, 125
 Slight the young RHODIAN's variegated strain; *
 Tho' with less force he strike an humbler shell,
 Beneath his hand the notes of Passion swell.
 His tender Genius, with alluring art,
 Displays the tumult of the Virgin's heart, 130
 When Love, like quivering rays that never rest,
 Darts thro' each vein, and vibrates in her breast.
 Tho' Nature feel his Verse, tho' she declare
 Medea's magic is still potent there,
 Yet Fancy sees the flighted Poet rove 135
 In pensive anger thro' th' Elysian Grove.
 From Critic shades, whose supercilious pride
 His Song neglected, or his Powers decried,

* Ver. 126. See NOTE IV.

EP. II. ESSAY ON EPIC POETRY. 39

He turns indignant — unopprest by fears,
Behold, he seeks the sentence of his Peers. 140

See their just band his honest claim allow !
See pleasure lighten on his laurell'd brow !
He soars the Critic's cold contempt above,
For VIRGIL greets him with fraternal love !

Hail, thou rich Column, on whose high-wrought frame
The Roman Muse supports her Epic fame ! 146

Hail, great Magician, whose illusive charms
Gave pleasing lustre to a Tyrant's arms,
To Jove's pure sceptre turn'd his iron rod,
And made the Homicide a Guardian God ! 150

Hail, wond'rous Bard, to Glory's temple led
Thro' paths that Genius rarely deigns to tread ;
For Imitation, she whose syren song
Betrays the skilful and unnerves the strong,
Preserving thee on her perfidious shore, 155

Where many a Poet had been wreck'd before,
Led thee to heights that charm th' astonish'd eye,
And with Invention's heaven in splendor vie.

As Rome herself, by long unwearied toil,
 Glean'd the fair produce of each foreign soil ; 160
 From all her wide Dominion's various parts
 Borrow'd their laws, their usages, their arts ;
 Imported knowledge from each adverse zone,
 And made the wisdom of the world her own :
 Thy patient spirit thus, from every Bard 165
 Whose mental riches won thy just regard,
 Drew various treasure ; which thy skill refin'd,
 And in the fabric of thy Verse combin'd,
 It was thy glory, as thy fond desire,
 To echo the sweet notes of HOMER's lyre ; 170
 But with an art thy hand alone can reach,
 An art that has endear'd the strain of each.
 So the young Nymph, whose tender arms embrace
 An elder Sister of enchanting grace,
 Though form'd herself with every power to please, 175
 By genuine character and native ease,
 Yet fondly copies from her favourite Fair
 Her mien, her motion, her attractive air,

Her

EP. II. ESSAY ON EPIC POETRY. 41

Her robe's nice shape, her riband's pleasing hue,
 And every ornament that strikes the view ; 180
 But she displays, by imitative art,
 So quick a spirit, and so soft a heart,
 The graceful mimic while our eyes adore,
 We think the model cannot charm us more :
 Tho' seen together, each more lovely shews, 185
 And by comparison their beauty grows.

Some Critics, to decide which Bard prevails,
 Weigh them like Jove, but not in golden scales ;
 In their false balance the wrong'd GREEK they raise,
 VIRGIL sinks loaded with their heavy praise. * 190
 Ingenuous Bard, whose mental rays divine,
 Shaded by modest doubts, more sweetly shine ;
 Thou whose last breath, unconscious of the wrong,
 Doom'd to destruction thy sublimest Song ;
 How dull their incense in thy sight must burn ; 195
 How must thy spirit with abhorrence turn

* Ver. 190. See NOTE V.

From their disgusting rites, who at thy shrine
 Blaspheme thy Master's name, to honor thine !
 More equal tribute, in their simpler flowers,
 The Poets offer to your separate powers ; 200
 For all poetic eyes delight to view
 Your different forms, and with devotion due
 In each the radiant Delphic God they own,
 By beauteous majesty distinctly shewn ;
 But they behold the lofty HOMER stand 205
 The bright Colossus of the Rhodian land,
 Beneath whose feet the waves submissive roll,
 Whose towering head appears to prop the pole ;
 Stupendous Image ! grand in every part,
 And seeming far above the reach of mortal art. 210
 In thee, thou lovely Mantuan Bard, appear
 The softer features of the Belvidere ;
 That finish'd grace which fascinates all eyes,
 Yet from the copying hand elusive flies ;
 Charms so complete, by such pure spirit warm'd, 215
 They make less perfect beauty seem deform'd.

O had thy Muse, whose decorating skill
Could spread rich foliage o'er the leafless hill ;
Had she, who knew with nicest hand to frame
The sweet unperishable wreaths of fame ; 220
Had she, exalted by a happier fate,
Virtue's free Herald, and no Slave of State,
Deck'd worthier shrines with her unfading flower,
And given to Freedom what she gave to Power ;
Then with more keen delight and warmer praise 225
The world had listen'd to thy bolder lays ;
Perchance had ow'd to thee (a mighty debt)
Verse where Perfection her bright seal had set,
Where Art could nothing blame and Nature nought
regret. }

Of coarser form, with less pathetic charms, 230
Hating with Stoic pride a tyrant's arms,
In the keen fervor of that florid time
When youthful Fancy pours her hasty rhyme,
When all the mind's luxuriant shoots appear,
Untrimm'd by Art, by Interest, or Fear, 235

See

See daring LUCAN for that wreath contend,
 Which Freedom twines for her poetic friend.
 'Tis thine, thou bold but injur'd Bard, 'tis thine !
 Tho' Critic spleen insult thy rougher line ;
 Tho' wrong'd thy Genius, and thy Name misplac'd
 By vain distinctions of fastidious Taste ; 241
 Indignant Freedom, with just anger fir'd,
 Shall guard the Poet whom herself inspir'd.
 What tho' thy early, uncorrected page
 Betrays some marks of a degenerate age ; 245
 Tho' many a tumid point thy verse contains,
 Like warts projecting from Herculean veins ;
 Tho' like thy CATO thy stern Muse appear,
 Her manners rigid, and her frown austere ;
 Like him, still breathing Freedom's genuine flame,
 Justice her idol, Public Good her aim, 251
 Well she supplies her want of softer art
 By all the sterling treasures of the heart ;
 By Energy, from Independance caught,
 And the free Vigor of unborrow'd Thought. 255
 Thou

EP. II. ESSAY ON EPIC POETRY. 45

Thou Bard most injur'd by malicious fate,
 Could not thy Blood appease a Tyrant's hate?
 Must He, still gall'd by thy poetic claim,
 With falshood persecute thy moral fame?
 Shall History's pen, to aid his vengeance won, * 260
 Brand thee, brave Spirit! as an impious Son,
 Who meanly fear'd to yield his vital blood,
 And fought his safety by a Parent's blood?
 Base calumny, at which Belief must halt,
 And blind Credulity herself revolt. 265
 Could that firm Youth become so vile a slave,
 Whose voice new energy to virtue gave;
 Whose Stoic soul all abject thoughts abhorr'd,
 And own'd no sordid passion as its lord;
 Who in the trying hour of mortal pain, 270
 While life was ebbing from his open vein,
 Alike unconscious of Remorse and Fear,
 His heart unshaken, and his senses clear,

* Ver. 260. See NOTE VI.

Smil'd on his doom, and, like the fabled bird
 Whose music on Meander's bank was heard, 275
 Form'd into tuneful notes his parting breath,
 And sung th' approaches of undreaded death?
 Rise, thou wrong'd Bard! above Detraction's reach,
 Whose arts in vain thy various worth impeach;
 Enjoy that fame thy spirit knew to prize, 280
 And view'd so fondly with prophetic eyes,
 Tho' the nice Critics of fastidious France
 Survey thy Song with many a scornful glance,
 And as a Goth the kinder judge accuse,
 Who with their great CORNEILLE commends thy Muse,
 Let Britain, eager as the Lesbian State 286
 To shield thy Pompey from the wrongs of Fate,
 To thee with pride a fond attachment shew,
 Thou Bard of Freedom! tho' the world's thy foe.
 As keenly sensible of Beauty's sway, 290
 Let our just isle such generous honor pay

To

To the fair partner of thy hapless life,
 As Lesbos paid to Pompey's lovely Wife. *
 Ye feeling Painters, who with genius warm
 Delineate Virtue in her softest form, 295
 Let ARGENTARIA on your canvass shine, †
 A graceful mourner at her Poet's shrine;
 For, nobly fearless of the Tyrant's hate,
 She mourns her murder'd Bard in solemn state;
 With pious care she decks his splendid tomb, 300
 Where the dark Cypress sheds its soothing gloom,
 There frequent takes her solitary stand,
 His dear Pharsalia in her faithful hand;
 That hand, whose toil the Muses still rehearse,
 Which fondly copied his unfinish'd Verse. 305
 See, as she bends before his recent urn,
 See tender Grief to Adoration turn!
 O lovely Mourner! could my Song bestow
 Unfading glory on thy generous woe,

* Ver. 293. See NOTE VII.

† Ver. 296. See NOTE VIII.

Age after age thy virtue should record, 310
And thou should'st live immortal as thy Lord.
Him Liberty shall crown with endless praise,
True to her cause in Rome's degenerate days ;
Him, like his Brutus, her fond eye regards,
And hails him as the last of Roman Bards. 315

END OF THE SECOND EPISTLE.

EPISTLE

I.
10
5
E P I S T L E

T H E T H I R D.

E
Vol. III.

E

A R G U M E N T
OF THE THIRD EPISTLE.

*Sketch of the Northern and the Provençal Poetry.—
The most distinguished Epic Poets of Italy, Spain,
Portugal, France, and England.*

A N
E S S A Y
O N
E P I C P O E T R Y.

E P I S T L E III.

BLEST be the hand that with a generous care,
To the bright Crown which Learning loves to wear,
Restores the Gem, whose lustre, faint and pale,
Died in the fold of dark Oblivion's veil.
Such praise, O MASON ! to the Bard is due, 5
In whose fraternal guard thy Genius grew ;
O'er whose untimely grave thy Lyre has paid
Its just devotion to a Brother's shade :

And thus hereafter shall the British Muse,
 In Memory's fane the fairest tablet chuse, 10
 To bid her sons your blended names admire,
 The pride of Friendship's as of Fancy's choir.

Thy modest GRAY, solicitous to pierce
 The dark and distant source of modern Verse,
 By strings untried first taught his English Lyre 15
 To reach the Gothic Harp's terrific fire :
 The North's wild spectres own his potent hand,
 And Hell's nine portals at his voice expand ;
 With new existence by his Verse endued,
 See Gothic Fable wakes her shadowy brood, 20
 Which, in the Runic rhymes of many a *Scald*,
 With pleasing dread our Northern fires appall'd.

Ye brave Progenitors, ye vigorous Source
 Of modern Freedom and of Europe's force,
 While your rude minds, athirst for martial strife, 25
 Mock'd all the meaner arts of polish'd life,
 The Muse still led you by her magic clue,
 And from your savage strength new vigor drew.

EP. III. ESSAY ON EPIC POETRY. 53

In War's dire field your dauntless Bards appear'd,
Aloft their animating harps they rear'd, 30
Pour'd through the charging host their potent strain,
And swell'd the fiery flood in Valor's vein.

Souls thus inspir'd, in every scene elate,
Defied the utmost rage of adverse fate ;
In tort'ring death the Royal Captive sang, 35
And smiles of triumph hid his mortal pang. *
Thus to brave ODIN's Songs, our Northern fire,
Rude, early framer of the modern Lyre,
Fierce Freedom gave an energy sublime,
Parent and Guardian of the Gothic Rhyme. 40

While nurtur'd in the North's protecting arms,
The modern Muse display'd her infant charms,
Like Jove's undaunted Child her spirit glow'd,
And force Herculean in her cradle shew'd ;
Her native scene in roughness she surpass, 45
Her breath tempestuous as the Northern blast :

* Ver. 36. See NOTE I.

But, when to softer climes the vagrant flew,
 And bask'd beneath a sky of azure hue ;
 When for her throne the flowery South she chose,
 And form'd her crown of the Provençal Rose ; 50
 Warm'd by a brighter Sun's relaxing beams,
 She tun'd her alter'd voice to tender themes :
 Here her gay form a gaudier dress assumes,
 And shines in Chivalry's imperial plumes ;
 Her votaries wear proud Honor's mystic glove, 55
 And every lyre resounds Romantic Love ;
 Save when, to burst Oppression's mental chain,
 Keen Satire mingles with this gallant train,
 Strikes Priestly pride with Wit's vindictive flash,
 And galls the ghostly Tyrant with her lash. * 60
 Afraid of Poesy's expansive flood,
 These early Bards along the shallows scud
 In some light skiff ; for on the depths untried
 No full-trimm'd vessel floats in Epic pride.

* Ver. 60. See NOTE II.

EP. III. ESSAY ON EPIC POETRY. 55

As infants, eager for regard, abound 65

In sportive efforts of uncertain sound,

Before their little artless lips can reach

The harder elements of perfect speech ;

So the young language of each modern clime

Rose by prelusive lays to lofty rhyme. 70

Thro' many an age, while, in the Convent bred,

O'er the chill'd mind scholastic darkness spread,

Those keener Spirits, who from Nature caught

The warmth that kindles to Poetic thought,

Betray'd, Ambition ! by thy blind desire, 75

Struck with ill-fated zeal the Latian lyre, *

Tho' Discord's hand the jarring strings had cross'd,

And all the sweetness of their tone was lost.

At length, fair Italy, luxuriant land,

Where Art's rich flowers in earliest bloom expand, 80

Thy daring DANTE his wild Vision sung, †

And rais'd to Epic pomp his native Tongue.

* Ver. 76. See NOTE III.

† Ver. 81. See NOTE IV.

56 ESSAY ON EPIC POETRY. EP. III.

Down Arno's stream his new-form'd music floats,
 The proud vale echoing with his Tuscan notes.
 See the bold Bard now sink and now ascend, 85
 Wherever Thought can pierce or Life extend;
 In his wide circuit from Hell's drear abyss,
 Thro' purifying scenes to realms of perfect bliss,
 He seems begirt with all that airy throng,
 Who brighten or debase the Poet's song. 90
 Sublimest Fancy now directs his march
 To opening worlds, through that infernal arch
 O'er whose rough summit awful words are read,
 That freeze each entering soul with hopeless dread.
 Now at her bidding his strong numbers flow, 95
 And rend the heart at Ugolino's woe;
 While Nature's glory-giving tear bedews
 A tale unrivall'd by the Grecian Muse.
 Now to those notes that milder grief inspire,
 Pathetic Tenderness attunes his lyre, 100
 Which, soft as murmurs of the plaintive dove,
 Tells the sad issue of illicit love.

But

But all the worse companions of his way
 Soon into different sounds his ductile voice betray :
 Satiric Fury now appears his guide, 105
 Thro' thorny paths of Enmity and Pride ;
 Now quaint Conceit his wand'ring steps misleads
 Thro' all the hideous forms that Folly breeds ;
 Now Priestly Dullness the lost Bard enshrouds
 In cold confusion and scholastic clouds. 110
 Unequal Spirit ! in thy various strain,
 With all their influence Light and Darkness reign ;
 In thy strange Verse and wayward Theme alike
 New forms of Beauty and Disorder strike ;
 Extremes of Harmony and Discord dwell, 115
 The Seraph's music and the Demon's yell !
 The patient Reader, to thy merit just,
 With transport glows, and shudders with disgust.
 Thy Failings sprung from thy disastrous time ;
 Thy stronger Beauties from a soul sublime, 120
 Whose vigor bursts, like the volcano's flame,
 From central darkness to the sphere of fame.

Of

Of gentler mind, and with a heart to feel
 The fondest warmth of emulative zeal,
 Thy festive Scholar, who ador'd thy Lays, 125
 And grac'd thy Genius with no scanty praise,
 The gay BOCCACIO, tempts th' Italian Muse *
 More varied notes and different themes to chuse ;
 Themes which her voice had dar'd not yet to sound,
 Valour's heroic feats by Beauty crown'd. 130
 Sweet was the glowing Song ; but, strange to tell,
 On his bold lyre Oblivion's shadows fell ;
 His richer Tales engross'd the World's regard,
 And the bright Novelist eclips'd the Bard.
 In following ages, when Italia's shore 135
 Blaz'd with the rising light of Classic lore,
 Stern System led, from her new-founded school,
 A Poet fashion'd by her rigid rule :
 Behold my Son ! (his sapient Tut'refs cried)
 Who throws the bonds of Gothic rhyme aside ; 140

* Ver. 127. See NOTE V.

For whom these hands the Grecian Lyre new strung :

She spoke exulting, and TRISSINO sung. *

In his cold Verse he kept her Critic laws,

While Pedants own'd their pow'r, and yawn'd applause.

Indignant Fancy, who with scorn survey'd 145

The sleepy honors to proud System paid,

Smiling to see that on her rival's brow

The Poppy lurk'd beneath the Laurel bough,

Resolv'd in sportive triumph to display

The rich extent of her superior sway : 150

From Necromancy's hand, in happiest hour,

She caught the rod of visionary power ;

And as aloft the magic wand she rais'd,

A peerless Bard with new effulgence blaz'd,

Born every law of System to disown, 155

And rule by Fancy's boundless power alone.

High in mid air, between the Moon and Earth,

The Bard of Pathos now, and now of Mirth,

* Ver. 142. See NOTE VI.

EP. III. ESSAY ON EPIC POETRY. 61

But his sweet Song her anger so beguil'd,
That, ere she finish'd her reproof, she smil'd. 180

Of chaster fire, a rival name succeeds,
Whose bold and glowing hand Religion leads:
In solemn accent, and in sacred state,
With classic lore and Christian zeal elate,
Sweetly pathetic, and sublimely strong, 185
Tasso begins his more majestic song;
The Muse of Sion, not implor'd in vain,
Guides to th' impassion'd soul his heavenly strain.
Blush, BOILEAU, blush, and for that pride atone,
Which slander'd Genius far above thy own; 190
And thou, great injur'd Bard, thy station claim
Amid the Demi-gods of Epic name;
Heir to a mantle by the Muses spun,
Of a poetic Sire the more poetic Son. *

Nor, tho' just Fame her richer palm devote 195
To the high-sounding lyre of serious note,

* Ver. 194. See NOTE VII.

Shall gay TASSONI want his festive crown, *
 Who banish'd from the Muse her awful frown,
 And, tuning to light themes her lofty style,
 O'er her grave features spread a comic smile. 200

Such various Sons, of Epic fire possess,
 Italia foster'd on her feeling breast.

Spain, whose bold genius with misjudging pride
 O'ersteps true glory by too large a stride,
 Claims higher merit from one Poet's birth, 205

Who rivals all the different Bards of earth :
 With more than Niobe's parental boast,
 She calls her single Son himself an Host,
 And rashly judges that her VEGA's lyre †
 Is equal to the whole Aonian quire. 210

Impetuous Poet ! whose full brain supplied
 Such floods of Verse, and in so quick a tide,
 Their rapid swell, by its unrivall'd height,
 Pleas'd, yet produc'd more wonder than delight :

* Ver. 197. See NOTE VIII.

† Ver. 209. See NOTE IX.

EP. III. ESSAY ON EPIC POETRY. 63

Tho' thy free rhyme from Fancy's fountain gush, 215
And with the grandeur of the torrent rush,
Its troubled streams in dark disorder roam,
With all the torrent's noise and all its foam.
To Emulation fir'd by Tasso's strain,
Thy spirit quitted the dramatic plain 220
To seek those Epic heights, sublimely calm,
Whence he had pluck'd his Idumean palm ;
But, vainly struggling in a task too hard,
Sunk at the feet of that superior Bard.
Brave Spaniard ! still thy wounded pride console ; 225
Time shall not strike thy name from Glory's roll,
On which thy generous and fraternal hand
Emblaz'd each brother of thy tuneful band ;
Thy Muse shall share the praise she joy'd to give,
And while thy language lasts thy fame shall live. 230
Perchance, tho' strange the paradox may seem,
That fame had risen with a brighter beam,
Had radiant Fancy less enrich'd thy mind :
Her lavish wealth, for wiser use design'd,

Ruin'd the Poet by its splendid lure, 235

As India's mines have made his country poor.

With warmth more temperate, and in notes more
clear,

That with Homeric richness fill the ear,

The brave ERCILLA sounds, with potent breath, *

His Epic trumpet in the fields of death. 240

In scenes of savage war when Spain unfurl'd

Her bloody banners o'er the western world,

With all his Country's virtues in his frame,

Without the base alloy that stain'd her name,

In Danger's camp this military Bard, 245

Whom Cynthia saw on his nocturnal guard,

Recorded, in his bold descriptive lay,

The various fortune of the finish'd day ;

Seizing the pen while Night's calm hours afford

A transient slumber to his fatiate fword, 250

With noble justice his warm hand bestows

The meed of Honor on his valiant foes.

* Ver. 239. See NOTE X.

EP. III. ESSAY ON EPIC POETRY. 65

Howe'er precluded, by his generous aim,
From high pretensions to inventive fame,
His strongly-colour'd scenes of sanguine strife, 255
His softer pictures caught from Indian life,
Above the visionary forms of art,
Fire the awaken'd mind and melt the heart.

Tho' fiercest tribes her galling fetters drag,
Proud Spain must strike to Lusitania's flag, 260
Whose ampler folds, in conscious triumph spread,
Wave o'er her NAVAL POET's laureate head.
Ye Nymphs of Tagus, from your golden cell,
That caught the echo of his tuneful shell,
Rise, and to deck your darling's shrine provide 265
The richest treasures that the deep may hide:
From every land let grateful Commerce shower
Her tribute to the Bard who sung her power;
As those rich gales, from whence his GAMA caught
A pleasing earnest of the prize he fought, 270
The balmy fragrance of the East dispense,
So steals his Song on the delighted sense,

Astonishing, with sweets unknown before,
 Those who ne'er tasted but of classic lore.
 Immortal Bard ! thy name with GAMA vies, 275
 Thou, like thy Hero, with propitious skies
 The sail of bold adventure hast unfurl'd,
 And in the Epic ocean found a world.
 'Twas thine to blend the Eagle and the Dove,
 At once the Bard of Glory and of Love : * 280
 Thy thankless Country heard thy varying lyre
 To PETRARCH's Softness melt, and swell to HOMER's
 Fire !

Boast and lament, ungrateful land, a Name,
 In life, in death, thy honor and thy shame.
 Thou nobler realm, whom vanity betrays 285
 To load thy letter'd sons with lavish praise ;
 Where Eulogy, with one eternal smile, †
 Heaps her faint roses in a withering pile :

* Ver. 280. See NOTE XI.

† Ver. 287. See NOTE XII.

EP. III. ESSAY ON EPIC POETRY. 67

A City milk-maid, on the first of May,
Who, pertly civil, and absurdly gay, 290
Forms her dull garland in fantastic state,
With ill-adjusted flow'rs and borrow'd plate.
Canst thou, self-flattering France, with justice vaunt
One Epic laurel as thy native plant ?
How oft a Gallic hand, with childish fire, 295
Has rattled Discord on th' heroic lyre,
While their dull aid associate Critics bring,
And vainly teach the use of every string !
In Morals, as, with many an empty boast,
They practise virtue least who preach it most ; 300
So, haughty Gallia, in thy Epic school,
No great Examples rise, but many a Rule. *
Yet, tho' unjust to Tasso's nobler lays,
Keen BOILEAU shall not want his proper praise ; †
He, archly waving his satiric rod 305
Thro' the new path which first TASSONI trod,

* Ver. 302. See NOTE XIII.

† Ver. 304. See NOTE XIV.

Pursued his sportive march in happy hour,
 And pluck'd from Satire's thorn a festive flower.
 His sacerdotal War shall wake delight,
 And smiles in Gravity herself excite, 310
 While Canons live to quarrel or to feast,
 And gall can tinge the spirit of a Priest.

Nor, gentle GRESSET, shall thy sprightly rhyme *
 Cease to enchant the list'ning ear of Time ;
 In thee the Graces all their powers instill, 315
 To touch the Epic chords with playful skill.
 The hapless Parrot whom thy lays endear,
 In piety and woe the Trojan's peer ;
 His heart as tender, and his love more pure,
 Shall, like Æneas, live of fame secure ; 320
 While female hands, with many a tender word,
 Stroke the soft feathers of their fav'rite bird.

Yet not in childish sport, or trifling joy,
 Do Gallic Fair-ones all their hours employ :

† Ver. 313. See NOTE XV.

EP. III. ESSAY ON EPIC POETRY. 69

See lovely BOCCAGE, in ambition strong, * 325

Build, with aspiring aim, her Epic Song !

By Glory fir'd, her rosy lips rehearse

Thy feats, Columbus, in unborrow'd Verse.

If this new Muse in War's dire field displays

No Grecian splendor, no Homeric blaze, 330

Attractive still, tho' not in pomp array'd,

She charms like Zama, in her Verse portray'd ;

Whose form from dress no gorgeous pride assumes,

Clad in a simple zone of azure plumes.

England's dear guest ! this Muse of Gallia caught

From our inspiring Isle her ardent thought ; 336

Here first she strove to reach, with vent'rous hope,

MILTON's chaste grandeur, and the grace of POPE ;

And sweetly taught, in her mimetic strain,

The Songs of Britain to the Banks of Seine. 340

But see ! with wounded Pride's indignant glance,

The angry Genius of presuming France

* Ver. 325. See NOTE XVI.

From ancient shrines their Epic wreaths would tear,
To swell the glory of her great VOLTAIRE. *

O, form'd in Learning's various paths to shine,
Encircled from thy birth by all the Nine, 346

On thee, blest Bard, these rivals seem'd to shower
Their various attributes and blended power !

But, when their lofty leader bade thee frame
The rich Heroic song on Henry's fame, 350

Sarcastic Humour, trifling with her lyre,
Took from th' inspiring Muse her solemn fire.

No more her spirit like the Eagle springs,

• Or rides the buoyant air with balanc'd wings :

Tho' rapid still, to narrow circuits bound, 355

She, like the darting Swallow, skims the ground.

Thy Verse displays, beneath an Epic name,

Wit's flinty Spark, for Fancy's solar Flame.

While yet thy hand the Epic chords embrac'd,

With playful spirit, and with frolic haste, 360

* Ver. 344. See NOTE XVII.

EP. III. ESSAY ON EPIC POETRY. 71

Such lively sounds thy rapid fingers drew,
And thro' the festive notes so lightly flew,
Nature and Fancy join'd their charms to swell,
And laughing Humour crown'd thy new Pucelle ;
But the chaste Muses, startled at the sound, 365
Amid thy sprightly numbers blush'd and frown'd ;
With decent anger, and becoming pride,
Severer Virtue threw the Song aside ;
While Justice own'd it, with a kinder glance,
The wittiest Levity of wanton France. 370

Now, graver Britain, amiably severe,
To thee, with native zeal, to thee I steer ;
My vent'rous bark, its foreign circuit o'er,
Exulting springs to thy parental shore.

Thou gorgeous Queen, who, on thy silvery coast,
Sittest encircled by a filial host, 376
And see'st thy sons, the jewels of thy crown,
Blaze with each varying ray of rich renown ;
If with just love I hold their Genius dear,
Lament their hardships, and their fame revere, 380

O bid thy Epic Muse, with honour due,
Range her departed Champions in my view !

See, on a party-colour'd steed of fire,
With Humour at his side, his trusty Squire,
Gay CHAUCER leads—in form a Knight of old, 385
And his strong armour is of steel and gold ;
But o'er it age a cruel rust has spread,
And made the brilliant metals dark as lead.

Now gentle SPENSER, Fancy's fav'rite Bard,
Awakes my wonder and my fond regard ; 390
Encircling Fairies bear, in sportive dance,
His adamantinè shield and magic lance ;
While Allegory, drest with mystic art,
Appears his Guide ; but, promising to dart
A lambent glory round her list'ning Son, 395
She hides him in the web herself has spun.

Ingenuous COWLEY, the fond dupe of Wit,
Seems like a vapour o'er the field to flit ;
In David's praise he strikes some Epic notes,
But soon down Lethe's stream their dying murmur floats.

EP. III. ESSAY ON EPIC POETRY. 73

While COWLEY vanish'd in an amorous riddle, 401
Up rose the frolic Bard of Bear and Fiddle :
His smile exhilarates the fullen earth,
Adorning Satire in the mask of Mirth :
Taught by his Song, Fanatics cease their jars, 405
And wise Astrologers renounce the Stars.
Unrival'd BUTLER ! blest with happy skill
To heal by comic verse each serious ill,
By Wit's strong flashes Reason's light dispense,
And laugh a frantic nation into sense ! 410
 Apart, and on a sacred hill retir'd,
Beyond all mortal inspiration fir'd,
The mighty MILTON sits—an host around
Of list'ning Angels guard the holy ground ;
Amaz'd they see a human form aspire 415
To grasp with daring hand a Seraph's lyre,
Inly irradiate with celestial beams,
Attempt those high, those soul-subduing themes,
(Which humbler Denizens of Heaven decline)
And celebrate, with sanctity divine, 420
The

The starry field from warring Angels won,
 And God triumphant in his Victor Son.
 Nor less the wonder, and the sweet delight,
 His milder scenes and softer notes excite,
 When at his bidding Eden's blooming grove 425
 Breathes the rich sweets of Innocence and Love.
 With such pure joy as our Forefather knew
 When Raphael, heavenly guest, first met his view,
 And our glad Sire, within his blissful bower,
 Drank the pure converse of th' ætherial Power, 430
 Round the blest Bard his raptur'd audience throng,
 And feel their souls imparadis'd in song.

Of humbler mien, but not of mortal race,
 Ill-fated DRYDEN, with Imperial grace,
 Gives to th' obedient lyre his rapid laws ; 435
 Tones yet unheard, with touch divine, he draws,
 The melting fall, the rising swell sublime,
 And all the magic of melodious rhyme.
 See with proud joy Imagination spread
 A wreath of honor round his aged head ! 440

But

But two base Spectres, tho' of different hue,
 The Bard unhappy in his march pursue ;
 Two vile disgraceful Fiends, of race accurst,
 Conceiv'd by Spleen, by meagre Famine nurs'd,
 Malignant Satire, mercenary Praise, 445
 Shed their dark spots on his immortal bays.

Poor DAVENANT march'd before, with nobler aim,
 His keen eye fixt upon the palm of Fame,
 But cruel Fortune doom'd him to rehearse
 A Theme ill-chosen, in ill-chosen Verse. 450

Next came Sir RICHARD, but in woeful plight,
 DRYDEN'S Led-horse first threw the luckless Knight.
 He rose advent'rous still—O who may count
 How oft he tried a different Steed to mount !
 Each angry steed his awkward rider flung ; 455
 Undaunted still he fell, and falling sung.

But Æsculapius, who, with grief distress'd,
 Beheld his offspring made a public jest,
 Soon bade a livelier Son with mirth efface
 The shame he suffer'd from Sir RICHARD'S case. 460

Swift

E P I S T L E

T H E F O U R T H .

A R G U M E N T

OF THE FOURTH EPISTLE.

Remarks on the supposed Parsimony of Nature in bestowing Poetic Genius.—The Evils and the Advantages of Poetry exemplified in the Fate of different Poets.

A N
E S S A Y
O N
E P I C P O E T R Y.

E P I S T L E IV.

SAY, generous Power, benignant Nature, say,
Who temp'rest with thy touch our human clay,
Warming the fields of Thought with genial care,
The various fruits of mental growth to bear ;
Shall not thy vot'ries glow with just disdain, 5
When Sloth or Spleen thy bounteous hand arraign ?
Art

Art thou the Niggard they pretend thou art,
 A grudging Parent with a Stepdame's heart ;
 And dost thou shed, with rare, reluctant toil,
 Bright Fancy's germens in the mental soil ? 10
 Is Genius, thy sweet Plant of richest power,
 Whose dearly-priz'd and long-expected flower
 More tardy than the Aloe's bloom appears,
 Ordain'd to blow but in a thousand years ?
 Perish the sickly thought—let those who hold 15
 Thy quick'ning influence so coy, so cold,
 Calmly the habitable earth survey,
 From time's first æra to the passing day ;
 In what rude clime, beneath what angry skies,
 Have plants Poetic never dar'd to rise ? 20
 In torrid regions, where 'tis toil to think,
 Where souls in stupid ease supinely sink ;
 And where the native of the desert drear
 Yields to blank darkness half his icy year ;
 In these unfriendly scenes, where each extreme 25
 Of heat and cold forbids the mind to teem,

EP. IV. ESSAY ON EPIC POETRY. 81

Poetic blossoms into Being start,

Spontaneous produce of the feeling heart.

Can we then deem that in those happier lands,

Where every vital energy expands ; 30

Where Thought, the golden harvest of the mind,

Springs into rich luxuriance, unconfin'd ;

That in such soils, with mental weeds o'ergrown,

The seeds of Poesy were thinly sown ?

Shall we deny the labor of the swain, 35

Who to the cultur'd earth confides the grain,

If all the vagrant harpies of the air

From its new bed the pregnant treasure tear ;

If, when scarce rising, with a stem infirm,

It dies the victim of the mining worm ; 40

If mildew, riding in the eastern gulf,

Turns all its ripening gold to fable dust ?

These foes combin'd (and with them who may cope?)

Are not more hostile to the Farmer's hope,

Than Life's keen passions to that lighter grain 45

Of Fancy, scatter'd o'er the infant brain.

82 ESSAY ON EPIC POETRY. EP. IV.

Pleasure, the rambling Bird ! the painted Jay !
 May snatch the richest seeds of Verse away ;
 Or Indolence, the worm that winds with art
 Thro' the close texture of the cleanest heart, 50
 May, if they haply have begun to shoot,
 With partial mischief wound the sick'ning root ;
 Or Avarice, the mildew of the soul,
 May sweep the mental field, and blight the whole ;
 Nay, the meek errors of the modest mind, 55
 To its own vigor diffidently blind,
 And that cold spleen, which falsely has declar'd
 The powers of Nature and of Art impair'd,
 The gate that Genius has unclos'd may guard,
 And rivet to the earth the rising Bard : 60
 For who will quit, tho' from mean aims exempt,
 The cares that summon, and the joys that tempt,
 In many a lonely studious hour to try
 Where latent springs of Poesy may lie ;
 Who will from social ease his mind divorce, 65
 To prove in Art's wide field its secret force,
 If,

EP. IV. ESSAY ON EPIC POETRY. 83

If, blind to Nature's frank parental love,
He deems that Verse, descended from above,
Like Heaven's more sacred signs, whose time is o'er,
A gift miraculous, conferr'd no more ? 70

O Prejudice ! thou bane of Arts, thou pest,
Whose ruffian powers the free-born soul arrest ;
Thou who, dethroning Reason, dar'st to frame
And issue thy proud laws beneath her name ;
Thou Coaster on the intellectual deep, 75
Ordering each timid bark thy course to keep ;
Who, lest some daring mind beyond thee steer,
Hast rais'd, to vouch thy vanity and fear,
Herculean pillars where thy sail was furl'd,
And nam'd thy bounds the Limits of the World. 80
Thou braggart, Prejudice, how oft thy breath
Has doom'd young Genius to the shades of death !
How often has thy voice, with brutal fire
Forbidding Female hands to touch the lyre,
Deny'd to Woman, Nature's fav'rite child, 85
The right to enter Fancy's opening wild !

Blest be this smiling hour, when Britain sees
 Her Fair-ones cancel such absurd decrees,
 In one harmonious group, with graceful scorn,
 Spring o'er the Pedant's fence of wither'd thorn, 90
 And reach Parnassian heights, where, laurel-crown'd,
 This softer Quire the notes of triumph sound ;
 Where SEWARD, leader of the lovely train,
 Pours o'er heroic tombs her potent strain ;
 Potent to sooth the honor'd dead, and dart 95
 Congenial virtue thro' each panting heart ;
 Potent thro' spirits masculine to spread
 Poetic jealousy and envious dread,
 If Love and Envy could in union rest,
 And rule with blended sway a Poet's breast : 100
 The Bards of Britain, with unjaundic'd eyes,
 Will glory to behold such rivals rise.
 Proceed, ye Sisters of the tuneful Shell, *
 Without a scruple, in that Art excel,

* Ver. 103. See NOTE I.

EP. IV. ESSAY ON EPIC POETRY. 85

Which reigns, by virtuous Pleasure's soft controul,
In sweet accordance with the Female soul ; 106
Pure as yourselves, and, like your charms, design'd
To bless the earth, and humanize mankind.

Where'er that Parent of engaging thought,
Warm Sensibility, like light, has taught 110
The bright'ning mirror of the mind to shew
Nature's reflected forms in all their glow ;
Where in full tides the fine affections roll,
And the warm heart invigorates the soul ;
In that rich spot, where winds propitious blow, 115
Culture may teach poetic Fame to grow.
Refin'd Invention and harmonious Rhyme,
Are the flow gifts of Study and of Time ;
But to the Bard whom all the Muses court,
His Sports are study, and his Studies sport. 120

E'en at this period, when all tongues declare
Poetic talents are a gift most rare,
Unnumber'd Spirits, in our generous isle,
Are ripening now beneath kind Nature's smile,

Whom happy care might lead to lasting fame, 125
And art ennoble with a Poet's name.

Not that 'tis granted this high prize to gain
By light effusions of a sportive vein,
The idle Ballad of a summer's morn,
The child of Frolic, in a moment born : 130
Who views such trifles with a vain regard,
But ill deserves the mighty name of Bard ;
In different tints see virtuous GRESSET trace
The genuine spirit of Poetic race :

* Let the true Bard (this pleasing Poet sings) 135
Bid his fair fame on strong foundations rest ;
His be each honour that from Genius springs,
Esteem'd by Judgment, and by Love carest ;

His

* Je veux qu'épris d'un nom plus légitime,
Que non content de se voir estimé,
Par son Genie un Amant de la rime
Emporte encor le plaisir d'être aimé ;

Qu'aux

His the Ambition, that in climes unknown,
 Where'er his wand'ring volume may extend, 140
 Where'er that Picture of his mind is shewn,
 In every Reader he may find a Friend.

Be it his aim to dart the living ray
 Of purest pleasure o'er th' enlighten'd earth ;
 And in sweet union let his works display 145
 The Poet's fancy and the Patriot's worth.

Thus far, O GRESSET, on these points agreed,
 My soul professes thy Poetic Creed ;
 Tho' the soft languor of thy song I blame,
 Which present ease prefers to future fame, 150
 Thy nobler maxims I with pride embrace,
 That Verse shou'd ever rise on Virtue's base,

Qu'aux régions à lui meme inconnues
 Ou voleront ses gracieux écrits,
 A ce tableau de ses mœurs ingénues,
 Tous ses Lecteurs deviennent ses Amis :

Que dissipant le préjugé vulgaire,
 Il montre enfin que sans crime on peut plaire,
 Et reunir, par un heureux lien,
 L' Auteur charmant et le vrai Citoyen.

88 ESSAY ON EPIC POETRY. Ep. IV.

And every master of this matchless art
 Exalt the Spirit, and improve the Heart ;
 And many a Youth, now rising into Man, 155
 Might build his glory on this noble plan,

With latent powers to make the structure last
 Till Nature dies, and Time itself be past :
 But O, how intricate the chances lurk,
 Whose power may drive him from the doubtful work!
 Of the strong minds by chaste Ambition nurs'd, 161

Who burn to rank in Honor's line the first,
 One leaves the Lyre to seize the martial crown,
 And one may drop it at a Parent's frown ;
 For still with scorn, which anxious fear inflames, 165
 Parental care 'gainst Poesy declaims !

 " Fly, fly, my son, (the fond adviser cries)
 " That thorny path, where every peril lies ;
 " Oh ! be not thou by that vain Art betray'd,
 " Whose pains are Substance, and whose joys are Shade !
 " Mark, in the Muses' miserable throng, 171
 " What air-built visions cheat the Sons of Song !

 " This

- " This is a lesson taught in every street,
 " And Bards may read it at each Stall they meet :
 " Take the first book, behold in many a page 175
 " What promises of life from age to age ;
 " The Poet swears himself he ne'er shall die,
 " A troop of rhyming friends support the lie :
 " Yet see how soon in Lethe's stream expire
 " This leading Bard and his attendant Quire, 180
 " And round these boards, their unexpected bier,
 " Their ghosts breathe wisdom in the passing ear :
 " For Stalls, like Church-yards, moral truth supply,
 " And teach the visionary Bard to die.
 " If present fame, thy airy hope, be gain'd, 185
 " By vigils purchas'd, and by toil maintain'd,
 " What base alloy must sink the doubtful prize,
 " Which Envy poisons, and which Spleen denies !
 " Observe what ills the living Bard attend,
 " Neglect his lot, and Penury his end ! 190
 " Behold the world unequally requite
 " Two Arts that minister to chaste delight,
 " Twin-

- " Twin-sisters, who with kindred beauty strike,
 " In fortune different, as in charms alike :
 " PAINTING, fair Danae! has her Golden shower,
 " But Want is POESY's proverbial dower, 196
 " See, while with brilliant genius, ill applied,
 " The noble RUBENS flatters Royal pride,
 " Makes all the Virtues, who abjur'd him, wait
 " On abject JAMES, in allegoric state ; 200
 " O'er the base Pedant his rich radiance flings,
 " And deifies the meanest of our Kings ;
 " His Son rewards, and Honor owns the deed,
 " The splendid Artist with a princely meed.
 " Now turn to MILTON's latter days, and see 205
 " How Bards and Painters in their fate agree ;
 " Behold him sell his heaven-illumin'd page,
 " Mirac'lous child of his deserted age,
 " For such a pittance, so ignobly slight,
 " As wounded Learning blushes to recite ! * 210
 " If changing times suggest the pleasing hope,
 " That Bards no more with adverse fortune cope ;

* Ver. 210. See NOTE II.

" That in this alter'd clime, where Arts increase,
 " And make our polish'd Isle a second Greece ;
 " That now, if Poesy proclaims her Son, 215
 " And challenges the wreath by Fancy won ;
 " Both Fame and Wealth adopt him as their heir,
 " And liberal Grandeur makes his life her care ;
 " From such vain thoughts thy erring mind defend,
 " And look on CHATTERTON's disastrous end. 220
 " Oh, ill-starr'd Youth, whom Nature form'd, in vain,
 " With powers on Pindus' splendid height to reign !
 " O dread example of what pangs await
 " Young Genius struggling with malignant fate !
 " What could the Muse, who fir'd thy infant frame
 " With the rich promise of Poetic fame ; 226
 " Who taught thy hand its magic art to hide,
 " And mock the insolence of Critic pride ;
 " What cou'd her unavailing cares oppose,
 " To save her darling from his desperate foes ; 230
 " From pressing Want's calamitous controul,
 " And Pride, the fever of the ardent soul ?

" Ah,

“ Ah, fee, too conscious of her failing power,

“ She quits her Nursling in his deathful hour !

“ In a chill room, within whose wretched wall 235

“ No cheering voice replies to Misery’s call ;

“ Near a vile bed, too crazy to sustain

“ Misfortune’s wasted limbs, convuls’d with pain,

“ On the bare floor, with heaven-directed eyes,

“ The hapless Youth in speechless horror lies ! 240

“ The pois’nous vial, by distraction drain’d,

“ Rolls from his hand, in wild contortion strain’d :

“ Pale with life-wasting pangs, it’s dire effect,

“ And stung to madness by the world’s neglect,

“ He, in abhorrence of the dangerous Art, 245

“ Once the dear idol of his glowing heart,

“ Tears from his Harp the vain detested wires,

“ And in the frenzy of Despair expires !

“ Pernicious Poesy ! thy baleful sway

“ Exalts to weaken, flatters to betray ; 250

“ When thy fond Votary has to thee resign’d

“ The captive powers of his deluded mind,

“ Fantastic

" Fantastic hopes his swelling breast inflame,
 " Tempestuous passions tear his shatter'd frame,
 " Which sinks; for round it seas of trouble roar, 255
 " Admitting agony at every pore;
 " While Dullness, whom no tender feelings check,
 " Grins at his ruin, and enjoys the wreck;
 " Seen thro' the mist which clouds her heavy eyes,
 " The faults of Genius swell to double size, 260
 " His generous faults, which her base pride makes
 known,

" Insulting errors so unlike her own.

" Far then, my Son, far from this Syren steer;
 " Or, if her dulcet song must charm thy ear,
 " Let Reason bind thee, like the Greek of yore, 265
 " To catch her music, but escape her shore;
 " For never shall the wretch her power can seize,
 " Regain the port of Fortune, or of Ease."

Parental Fear thus warns the filial heart,
 From this alluring, this insidious Art; 270
 But, wounded thus by keen Invective's edge,
 Say, can the Muse no just defence alledge?

In striking contrast has she not to paint
 Her prosp'rous Hero, as her murder'd Saint?
 'Tis true, she oft has fruitless vigils kept, 275
 And oft, with unavailing sorrow, wept
 Her injur'd Vot'ries, doom'd to quit the earth
 In the sharp pangs of ill-requited worth.
 Ye noble Martyrs of poetic name,
 "Bliss to your Spirits, to your Mem'ries Fame!" 280
 By gen'rous Honor be your toils rever'd,
 To grateful Nature be your names endear'd!
 To all who Pity's feeling nerve possess,
 Doubly endear'd by undeserv'd distress.
 But, to relieve the pain your wrongs awake, 285
 O let the Muse her brighter records take,
 Review the crown by living Merit won,
 And share the triumph of each happier Son. 290
 If the young Bard who starts for Glory's goal,
 Can fate with present fame his ardent soul, 290
 Poetic story can with truth attest
 This rarest, richest prize in life possess.

See

EP. IV. ESSAY ON EPIC POETRY. 95

See the GAY POET of Italia's shore,
Whom with fond zeal her feeling sons adore,
Pass, while his heart with exultation beats, 295

Poetic Mantua's applauding streets !
See him, while Justice smiles, and Envy snarls,
Receive the Laurel from Imperial Charles ! *

And lo, th' unfading Gift still shines above
Each perishable mark of Royal Love. 300

If humbler views the tuneful mind inflame,
If to be rich can be a Poet's aim,
The Muse may shew, but in a different clime,
Wealth, the fair produce of applauded Rhyme.
Behold the fav'rite Bard of lib'ral Spain, 305

Her wond'rous VEGA, of exhaustless vein ;
From honest Poverty, his early lot,
With honor sullied by no vicious blot,
Behold him rise on Fortune's glittering wings,
And almost reach the opulence of Kings ; 310

* Ver. 298. See NOTE III.

The high-soul'd Nobles of his native land
 Enrich their Poet with so frank a hand !
 For him Pieria's rock with treasure teems,
 For him her fountains gush with golden streams ; *
 And ne'er did Fortune, with a love more just, 315
 Her splendid stores to worthier hands entrust ;
 For with the purest current, wide and strong,
 His Charity surpass his copious Song.

If the Enthusiast higher hope pursues,
 If from his commerce with th' inspiring Muse 320
 He seeks to gain, by no mean aims confin'd,
 Freedom of thought and energy of mind ;
 To raise his spirit, with ætherial fire,
 Above each little want and low desire ;
 O turn where MILTON flames with Epic rage, 325
 Unhurt by poverty, unchill'd by age :
 Tho' danger threaten his declining day,
 Tho' clouds of darkness quench his visual ray,

* Ver. 314. See NOTE IV.

The heavenly Muse his hallow'd spirit fills
 With raptures that surmount his matchless ills ; 330
 From earth she bears him to bright Fancy's goal,
 And distant fame illuminates his soul !

Too oft the wealthy, to proud follies born,
 Have turn'd from letter'd Poverty with scorn.
 Dull Opulence ! thy narrow joys enlarge ; 335
 To shield weak Merit is thy noblest charge :
 Search the dark scenes where drooping Genius lies,
 And keep from forriest fights a nation's eyes,
 That, from expiring Want's reproaches free,
 Our generous country may ne'er weep to see 340
 A future CHATTERTON by poison dead,
 An OTWAY fainting for a little bread.

If deaths like these deform'd our native isle,
 Some English Bards have bask'd in fortune's smile.
 Alike in Station and in Genius blest, 345
 By Knowledge prais'd, by Dignity carest,
 POPE's happy Freedom, all base wants above,
 Flow'd from the golden stream of Public Love ;

EP. IV. ESSAY ON EPIC POETRY. 99

Else had we seen a warm Poetic Youth
Change Fiction's roses for the thorns of Truth, 370
From Fancy's realm, his native field, withdraw,
To pay hard homage to severer Law?

O thou bright Spirit, whom the Asian Muse
Had fondly steep'd in all her fragrant dew,
And o'er whose early Song, that mental feast, 375
She breath'd the sweetness of the risted East;
Since independant Honor's high controul
Detach'd from Poesy thy ardent soul,
To seek with better hopes Persuasion's seat,
Blest be those hopes, and happy that retreat! 380
Which with regret all British Bards must see,
And mourn a Brother lost in losing thee.

Nor leads the Poet's path to that throng'd gate
Where crouching Priests on proud Preferment wait;
Where, while in vain a thousand vot'ries fawn, 385
She robes her fav'rite few in hallow'd Lawn:
Else, liberal MASON, had thy spotless name,
The Ward of Virtue as the Heir of Fame,

In lifts of mitred Lords been still unread,
 While Mitres drop on many a Critic's head ? 390
 Peace to all such, whose decent brows may bear
 Those sacred honors plac'd by Learning there ;
 May just respect from brutal insult guard
 Their Crown, unenvied by the genuine Bard !
 Let Poesy, embellish'd by thy care, 395
 Pathetic MASON ! with just pride declare,
 Thy breast must feel a more exulting fire,
 Than Pomp can give, or Dignity inspire,
 When Nature tells thee that thy Verse imparts
 The thrill of pleasure to ten thousand hearts ; 400
 And often has she heard ingenuous Youth,
 Accomplish'd Beauty, and unbiass'd Truth,
 Those faithful harbingers of future fame,
 With tender interest pronounce thy name
 With lively gratitude for joy refin'd, 405
 Gift of thy Genius to the feeling mind.
 These are the honors which the Muse confers,
 The radiant Crown of living light is her's ;

And

EP. IV. ESSAY ON EPIC POETRY. 101

And on thy brow she gave those gems to blaze,
That far outshine the Mitre's transient rays; 410
Gems that shall mock malignant Envy's breath,
And shine still brighter thro' the shades of death.

For me, who feel, whene'er I touch the lyre,
My talents sink below my proud desire;
Who often doubt, and sometimes credit give, 415
When Friends assure me that my Verse will live;
Whom health too tender for the bustling throng
Led into pensive shade and soothing song;
Whatever fortune my unpolish'd rhymes
May meet, in present or in future times, 420
Let the blest Art my grateful thoughts employ,
Which soothes my sorrow and augments my joy;
Whence lonely Peace and social Pleasure springs,
And Friendship, dearer than the smile of Kings!
While keener Poets, querulously proud, 425
Lament the Ills of Poesy aloud,
And magnify, with Irritation's zeal,
Those common evils we too strongly feel,

The envious Comment and the subtle Style
 Of specious Slander, stabbing with a smile ; 430
 Frankly I wish to make her Blessings known,
 And think those Blessings for her Ills atone :
 Nor wou'd my honest pride that praise forego,
 Which makes Malignity yet more my foe.

 If heart-felt pain e'er led me to accuse 435
 The dangerous gift of the alluring Muse,
 'Twas in the moment when my Verse imprest
 Some anxious feelings on a Mother's breast.

 O thou fond Spirit, who with pride hast smil'd,
 And frown'd with fear, on thy poetic child, 440
 Pleas'd, yet alarm'd, when in his boyish time
 He sigh'd in numbers, or he laugh'd in rhyme ;
 While thy kind cautions warn'd him to beware
 Of Penury, the Bard's perpetual snare ;
 Marking the early temper of his soul, 445
 Careless of wealth, nor fit for base controul :
 Thou tender Saint, to whom he owes much more
 Than ever Child to Parent ow'd before,

In

EP. IV. ESSAY ON EPIC POETRY. 103

In life's first season, when the fever's flame
Shrunk to deformity his shrivell'd frame, 450
And turn'd each fairer image in his brain
To blank confusion and her crazy train,
'Twas thine, with constant love, thro' ling'ring years,
To bathe thy Idiot Orphan in thy tears ;
Day after day, and night succeeding night, 455
To turn incessant to the hideous fight,
And frequent watch, if haply at thy view
Departed Reason might not dawn anew.
Tho' medicinal art, with pitying care,
Cou'd lend no aid to save thee from despair, 460
Thy fond maternal heart adher'd to Hope and Prayer :
Nor pray'd in vain ; thy child from Pow'rs above
Receiv'd the sense to feel and blest thy love ;
O might he thence receive the happy skill,
And force proportion'd to his ardent will, 465
With Truth's unfading radiance to emblaze
Thy virtues, worthy of immortal praise !

Nature, who deck'd thy form with Beauty's flowers,
Exhausted on thy soul her finer powers ;

Taught it with all her energy to feel 470

Love's melting softness, Friendship's fervid zeal,

The generous purpose, and the active thought,

With Charity's diffusive spirit fraught ;

There all the best of mental gifts she plac'd,

Vigor of Judgment, purity of Taste, 475

Superior parts, without their spleenful leaven,

Kindness to Earth, and confidence in Heaven.

While my fond thoughts o'er all thy merits roll,

Thy praise thus gushes from my filial soul ;

Nor will the Public with harsh rigor blame 480

This my just homage to thy honor'd name ;

To please that Public, if to please be mine,

Thy Virtues train'd me—let the praise be thine. 485

Since thou hast reach'd that world where Love alone,

Where Love Parental can exceed thy own ; 485

If in celestial realms the blest may know

And aid the objects of their care below,

While

EP. IV. ESSAY ON EPIC POETRY. 105

While in this sublunary scene of strife
Thy Son possesses frail and feverish life,
If Heaven allot him many an added hour, 490
Gild it with virtuous thought and mental power,
Power to exalt, with every aim refin'd,
The loveliest of the Arts that bless mankind !

END OF THE FOURTH EPISTLE.

EPISTLE

THE GREAT CALIFORNIA

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EPISTLE

THE FIFTH.

A R G U M E N T

OF THE FIFTH EPISTLE.

Examination of the received opinion, that supernatural Agency is essential to the Epic Poem. — The folly and injustice of all arbitrary systems in Poetry. — The Epic province not yet exhausted. — Subjects from English History the most interesting. — A national Epic Poem the great desideratum in English literature. — The Author's wish of seeing it supplied by the genius of Mr. MASON.

AN
ESSAY
ON
EPIC POETRY.

EPISTLE V.

ILL-FATED Poesy ! as human worth,
Prais'd, yet unaided, often sinks to earth ;
So sink thy powers ; not doom'd alone to know
Scorn, or neglect, from an unfeeling foe,
But destin'd more oppressive wrong to feel 5
From the misguided Friend's perplexing zeal.
Such Friends are those, who in their proud display
Of thy young beauty, and thy early sway,
Pretend

Pretend thou'rt robb'd of all thy warmth sublime,
By the benumbing touch of modern Time. 10

What! is the Epic Muse, that lofty Fair,
Who makes the discipline of Earth her care!
That mighty Minister, whom Virtue leads
To train the noblest minds to noblest deeds!
Is she, in office great, in glory rich, 15
Degraded to a poor, pretended Witch,
Who rais'd her spells, and all her magic power,
But on the folly of the favoring hour?
Whose dark, despis'd illusions melt away
At the clear dawn of Philosophic day? 20
To such they sink her, who lament her fall
From the high Synod of th' Olympian Hall;
Who worship System, hid in Fancy's veil,
And think that all her Epic force must fail,
If she no more can borrow or create 25
Celestial Agents to uphold her state.
To prove if this fam'd doctrine may be found
To rest on solid, or on sandy ground,

Let

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Let Critic Reason all her light diffuse
 O'er the wide empire of this injur'd Muse, 30
 To guide our search to every varied source
 And separate finew of her vital force.—
 To three prime powers within the human frame,
 With equal energy she points her aim :
 By pure exalted Sentiment she draws 35
 From Judgment's steady voice no light applause ;
 By Nature's simple and pathetic strains,
 The willing homage of the Heart she gains ;
 The precious tribute she receives from these,
 Shines undebas'd by changing Time's decrees ; 40
 The noble thought, that fir'd a Grecian soul,
 Keeps o'er a British mind its firm controul ;
 The scenes, where Nature seems herself to speak,
 Still touch a Briton, as they touch'd a Greek :
 To captivate admiring Fancy's eyes, 45
 She bids celestial decorations rise ;
 But, as a playful and capricious child
 Frowns at the splendid toy on which it smil'd ;
So

So wayward Fancy now with scorn surveys
 Those specious Miracles she lov'd to praise ; 50
 Still fond of change, and fickle Fashion's dupe,
 Now keen to soar, and eager now to stoop,
 Her Gods, Dev'ls, Saints, Magicians, rise and fall,
 And now she worships each, now laughs at all.

 If then within the rich and wide domain 55
 O'er which the Epic Muse delights to reign,
 One province weaker than the rest be found,
 'Tis her Celestial Sphere, or Fairy Ground :
 Her realm of Marvels is the distant land,
 O'er which she holds a perilous command ; 60
 For, plac'd beyond the reach of Nature's aid,
 Here her worst foes her tottering force invade :
 O'er the wide precinct proud Opinion towers,
 And withers with a look its alter'd powers ;
 While lavish Ridicule, pert Child of Taste ! 65
 Turns the rich confine to so poor a waste,
 That some, who deem it but a cumbrous weight,
 Would lop this Province from its Parent State.

What

EP. V. ESSAY ON EPIC POETRY. 113

What mighty voice first spoke this wond'rous law,
Which ductile Critics still repeat with awe— 70

That man's unkindling spirit must refuse
A generous plaudit to th' Heroic Muse,
Howe'er she paint her scenes of manly life,
If no superior Agents aid the strife?

In days of courtly wit, and wanton mirth, 75
The loose PETRONIUS gave the maxim birth; *
Perchance, to sooth the envious Nero's ear,
And sink the Bard whose fame he sigh'd to hear;
To injure LUCAN, whose advent'rous mind,
Inflam'd by Freedom, with just scorn resign'd 80
Th' exhausted fables of the starry pole,
And found a nobler theme in CATO's soul:
To wound him, in the mask of Critic art,
The subtle Courtier launch'd this venom'd dart,
And following Critics, fond of Classic lore, 85
Still echo the vain law from shore to shore;

* Ver. 76. See NOTE I.

On Poets still for Deities they call,

And deem mere earthly Bards no Bards at all.

Yet, if by fits the mighty HOMER nods,

Where sinks he more than with his sleepy Gods ? 90

E'en LUCAN proves, by his immortal name,

How weak the dagger levell'd at his fame ;

For in his Song, which Time will ne'er forget,

If Taste, who much may praise, will much regret,

'Tis not the absence of th' Olympian state, 95

Embroid'ed by jarring Gods in coarse debate :

'Tis nice arrangement, Nature's easy air,

In scenes unfolded with superior care ;

'Tis softer diction, elegantly terse,

And the fine polish of Virgilian Verse. 100

O blind to Nature ! who assert the Muse

Must o'er the human frame her empire lose,

Failing to fly, in Fancy's wild career,

Above this visible diurnal sphere !

Behold yon pensive Fair ! who turns with grief 105

The tender Novel's soul-posseſſing leaf !

EP. V. ESSAY ON EPIC POETRY. 115

Why with moist eyes to those soft pages glu'd,
Forgetting her fix'd hours of sleep and food ;
Why does she keenly grasp its precious woes,
Nor quit the volume till the story close ? 110

'Tis not that Fancy plays her revels there,
Cheating the mind with lucid forms of air ;
'Tis not that Passion, in a style impure,
Holds the warm spirit by a wanton lure :
'Tis suffering Virtue's sympathetic sway, 115
That all the fibres of her breast obey ;

'Tis Action, where Immortals claim no part ;

'Tis Nature, grappled to the human heart.

If this firm Sov'reign of the feeling breast
Can thus the fascinated thought arrest, 120
And thro' the bosom's deep recesses pierce,
Ungrac'd, unaided by enchanting Verse,
Say ! shall we think, with limited controul,
She wants sufficient force to seize the soul,
When Harmony's congenial tones convey 125
Charms to her voice, that aid its magic sway ?

If Admiration's hand, with eager grasp,
 Her darling HOMER's deathless volume clasp,
 Say to what scenes her partial eyes revert !
 Say what they first explore, and last desert ! — 130
 The scenes that glitter with no heavenly blaze,
 Where human agents human feelings raise,
 While Truth, enamor'd of the lovely line,
 Cries to their parent Nature, " These are thine."
 When Neptune rises in Homeric state, 135
 And on their Lord the Powers of Ocean wait ;
 Tho' pliant Fancy trace the steps he trod,
 And with a transient worship own the God,
 Yet colder readers with indifference view
 The Sovereign of the deep, and all his vassal crew, 140
 Nor feel his watery pomp their mind enlarge,
 More than the pageant of my Lord May'r's barge.
 But when Achilles' wrongs our eyes engage,
 All bosoms burn with sympathetic rage :
 And when thy love parental, Chief of Troy ! 145
 Hastes to relieve the terrors of thy boy,

Our senses in thy fond emotion join,
And every heart's in unison with thine.

Still in the Muse's ear shall Echo ring,
That heavenly Agents are her vital spring ? 150

Those who conclude her winning charms arise
From Beings darting from the distant skies,
Appear to cherish a conceit as vain,

As once was harbour'd in Neanthus' brain,
When he believ'd that harmony must dwell 155

In the cold concave of the Orphic shell :

The ancient Lyre, to which the Thracian sung,
Whose hallow'd chords were in a temple hung,
The shallow Youth with weak ambition sought,
And of the pilfering Priest the relique bought ; 160

Viewing his treasure with deluded gaze,
He deem'd himself the heir of Orphic praise ;
But when his awkward fingers tried to bring
Expected music from the silent string,

Not e'en the milder brutes his discord bore, 165

But howling dogs the fancied Orpheus tore. *

When the true Poet, in whose frame are join'd
Softness of Heart and Energy of Mind,

His Epic scene's expansive limit draws,

Faithful to Nature's universal laws ; 170

If thro' her various walks he boldly range,

Marking how oft her pliant features change ;

If, as she teaches, his quick powers supply

Successive pictures to th' astonish'd eye,

Where noblest passions noblest deeds inspire, 175

And radiant souls exhibit all their fire ;

Where softer forms their sweet attractions blend,

And suffering Beauty makes the world her friend ;

If thus he build his Rhyme, with varied art,

On each dear interest of the human heart, 180

* Ver, 166. See NOTE II.

His genius, by no vain conceits betray'd,
May spurn faint Allegory's feeble aid.

Th' Heroic Muse, in earthly virtue strong,
May drive the host of Angels from her Song,
As her fair Sister Muse, the Tragic Queen, 185
Has banish'd Ghosts from her pathetic scene,
Tho' her high soul, by SHAKESPEARE's magic sway'd,
Still bends to buried Denmark's awful Shade.

If we esteem this Epic Queen so great,
To spare her heavenly train, yet keep her state, 190
'Tis not our aim, with systematic pride,
To sink their glory, or their powers to hide,
Who add, when folded in the Muse's arms,
Celestial beauty to her earthly charms.

Sublimely fashion'd, by no mortal hands, 195
The dome of mental Pleasure wide expands :
Form'd to preside o'er its allotted parts,
At different portals stand the separate Arts ;
But every portal different paths may gain,
Alike uniting in the mystic Fane. 200

Contentious mortals on these paths debate ;
 Some, wrangling on the road, ne'er reach the gate,
 While others, arm'd with a despotic rod,
 Allow no pass but what themselves have trod.

The noblest spirits, to this foible prone, 205
 Have slander'd powers congenial with their own :
 Hence, on a Brother's genius MILTON frown'd,
 Scorning the graceful chains of final sound,
 And to one form confin'd the free sublime,
 Insulting DRYDEN as the Man of Rhyme. 210

Caprice still gives this lasting struggle life ;
 Rhyme and Blank Verse maintain their idle strife :
 The friends of one are still the other's foes,
 For stubborn Prejudice no mercy knows.
 As in Religion, Zealots, blindly warm, 215
 Neglect the Essence, while they grasp the Form ;
 Poetic Bigots, thus perversely wrong,
 Think Modes of Verse comprize the Soul of Song.

If the fine Statuary fill his part
 With all the powers of energetic Art ; 220

If

If to the figures, that, with skill exact,
 His genius blends in one impassion'd act,
 If to this Group such speaking force he give,
 That startled Nature almost cries, "They live ;"
 All tongues with zeal th' enchanting work applaud,
 Nor the great Artift of due praise defraud, 226
 Whether he form'd the rich expreffive mass
 Of Parian marble, or Corinthian brass ;
 For each his powers might fashion to fulfil
 The noblest purpose of mimetic skill ; 230
 Each from his soul might catch Promethean fire,
 And speak his talents, till the world expire.

'Tis thus that MILTON's Verse, and DRYDEN's
 Rhyme,

Are proof alike against the rage of Time ;
 Each Master modell'd, with a touch so bold, 235
 The rude materials which he chose to mould,
 That each his portion to perfection brought,
 Accomplishing the glorious end he sought.

False

EP. V. ESSAY ON EPIC POETRY. 123

Or, if she draw, by Fancy's magic tones,
Ætherial Spirits from their sapphire thrones, 260
Her Heavenly shapes with willing homage greet,
And aid, with ductile thought, her bright deceit;
For, if the Epic Muse still wish to tower
Above plain Nature's firm and graceful power,
Tho' Critics think her vital powers are lost 265
In cold Philosophy's petrific frost;
That Magic cannot her sunk charms restore,
That Heaven and Hell can yield her nothing more;
Yet may she dive to many a secret source
And copious spring of visionary force : 270
India yet holds a Mythologic mine,
Her strength may open, and her art refine :
Tho' Asian spoils the realms of Europe fill,
Those Eastern riches are unrifled still ;
Genius may there his course of honor run, 275
And spotless Laurels in that field be won. *

* Ver. 276. See NOTE III.

Yet

Yet nobler aims the Bards of Britain court,
Who steer by Freedom's star to Glory's port ;
Our gen'rous Isle, with far superior claim,
Asks for her Chiefs the palm of Epic fame. 280
In every realm where'er th' Heroic Muse
Has deign'd her glowing spirit to infuse,
Her tuneful Sons with civic splendor blaze,
The honour'd Heralds of their country's praise,
Save in our land, the nation of the earth 285
Ordain'd to give the brightest Heroes birth !—
By some strange fate, which rul'd each Poet's tongue,
Her dearest Worthies yet remain unsung.

Critics there are, who, with a scornful smile,
Reject the annals of our martial Isle, 290
And, dead to patriot Passion, coldly deem
They yield for lofty Song no touching theme.

What ! can the British heart, humanely brave,
Feel for the Greek who lost his female slave ?
Can it, devoted to a savage Chief, 295
Swell with his rage, and soften with his grief ?

And

EP. V. ESSAY ON EPIC POETRY. 125

And shall it not with keener zeal embrace
Their brighter cause, who, born of British race,
With the strong cement of the blood they spilt,
The splendid fane of British Freedom built ? 300

Blest Spirits ! who, with kindred fire endued,
Thro' different ages this bright work pursued,
May Art and Genius crown your faintest band
With that poetic wreath your Deeds demand !

While, led by Fancy thro' her wide domain, 305
Our steps advance around her Epic plain ;
While we survey each laurel that it bore,
And every confine of the realm explore,
See Liberty, array'd in light serene,
Pours her rich lustre o'er th' expanding scene ! 310
Thee, MASON, thee she views with fond regard,
And calls to nobler heights her fav'rite Bard.
Tracing a circle with her blazing spear.

" Here," cries the Goddess, " raise thy fabric here,
Build on these rocks, that to my reign belong, 315
The noblest basis of Heroic Song !

Fix here ! and, while thy growing works ascend,
My voice shall guide thee, and my arm defend."

As thus she speaks, methinks her high behest

Imparts pure rapture to thy conscious breast, 320

Pure as the joy immortal NEWTON found,

When Nature led him to her utmost bound,

And clearly shew'd, where unborn ages lie,

The distant Comet to his daring eye ;

Pure as the joy the Sire of mortals knew, 325

When blissful Eden open'd on his view,

When first he listen'd to the voice Divine,

And wond'ring heard, " This Paradise is thine."

With such delight may'st thou her gift receive !

May thy warm heart with bright ambition heave 330

To raise a Temple to her hallow'd name,

Above what Grecian artists knew to frame !

Of English form the sacred fabric rear,

And bid our Country with just rites revere

The Power, who sheds, in her benignant smile, 335

The brightest Glory on our boasted Isle !

Justly

Justly on thee th' inspiring Goddess calls ;
 Her mighty task each weaker Bard appalls :
 'Tis thine, O MASON ! with unbaffled skill,
 Each harder duty of our Art to fill ; 340
 'Tis thine, in robes of beauty to array,
 And in bright Order's lucid blaze display,
 The forms that Fancy, to thy wishes kind,
 Stamps on the tablet of thy clearer mind.
 How softly sweet thy notes of pathos swell, 345
 The tender accents of Elfrida tell ;
 Caractacus proclaims, with Freedom's fire,
 How rich the tone of thy sublimer Lyre ;
 E'en in this hour, propitious to thy fame,
 The rural Deities repeat thy name : 350
 With festive joy I hear the sylvan throng
 Hail the completion of their favorite Song,
 Thy graceful Song ! in honor of whose power,
 Delighted Flora, in her sweetest bower,
 Weaves thy unfading wreath ;—with fondest care, 355
 Proudly she weaves it, emulously fair,

To

To match that crown, which in the Mantuan grove
The richer Ceres for her VIRGIL wove !

See ! his Eurydice herself once more

Revisits earth from the Elysian shore ! 360

Behold ! she hovers o'er thy echoing glade !

Envy, not love, conducts the pensive Shade,

Who, trembling at thy Lyre's pathetic tone,

Fears lest Nerina's fame surpass her own.

Thou happy Bard ! whose sweet and potent voice 365

Can reach all notes within the Poet's choice ;

Whose vivid soul has led thee to infuse

Dramatic life in the preceptive Muse ;

Since, blest alike with Beauty and with Force,

Thou rivall'st VIRGIL in his Sylvan course, 370

O be it thine the higher palm to gain,

And pass him in the wide Heroic plain !

To sing, with equal fire, of nobler themes,

To gild Historic Truth with Fancy's beams !

To Patriot Chiefs unsung thy Lyre devote, 375

And swell to Liberty the lofty note !

With

With humbler aim, but no ungenerous view,
 My steps, less firm, their lower path pursue ;
 Of different Arts I search the ample field,
 Mark its past fruits, and what it yet may yield ; 380
 With willing voice the praise of Merit found,
 And bow to Genius wheresoever found ;
 O'er my free Verse bid noblest names preside,
 Tho' Party's hostile lines those names divide ;
 Party ! whose murdering spirit I abhor, 385
 More subtly cruel, and less brave than War.
 Party ! insidious Fiend ! whose vapors blind
 The light of Justice in the brightest mind ;
 Whose feverish tongue, whence deadly venom flows,
 Basely belies the merit of her foes ! 390
 O that my Verse with magic power were blest,
 To drive from Learning's field this baleful pest !
 Fond, fruitless wish ! the mighty task would foil
 The firmest sons of Literary Toil ;
 In vain a letter'd Hercules might rise 395
 To cleanse the stable where this Monster lies :

Yet, if the Imps of her malignant brood,
 With all their Parent's acrid gall endu'd ;
 If Spleen pours forth, to Mockery's apish tune,
 Her gibing Ballad, and her base Lampoon, 400
 On fairest names, from every blemish free,
 Save what the jaundic'd eyes of Party see ;
 My glowing scorn will execrate the rhyme,
 Tho' laughing Humor strike its tuneful chime ;
 Tho' keenest Wit the glitt'ring lines invest 405
 With all the splendor of the Adder's crest.

Sublimer MASON ! not to thee belong
 The reptile beauties of envenom'd Song.
 Thou chief of living Bards ! O be it ours,
 In fame tho' different, as of different powers, 410
 Party's dark clouds alike to rise above,
 And reach the firmament of Public Love !
 May'st thou ascend Parnassus' highest mound,
 In triumph there the Epic Trumpet sound ;
 While, with no envious zeal, I thus aspire 415
 By just applause to fan thy purer fire ;

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And of the Work which Freedom pants to see,
Which thy firm Genius claims reserv'd for thee,
In this frank style my honest thoughts impart,
If not an Artist yet a friend to Art ! 420

END OF THE FIFTH EPISTLE.

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N O T E S.

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N O T E S

T O T H E

F I R S T E P I S T L E.

N O T E I. V E R S E 7.

*SUCH dark decrees have letter'd Bigots penn'd,
Yet seiz'd that honor'd name, the Poet's Friend.]*

Of the several authors who have written on Epic Poetry, many of the most celebrated are more likely to confound and depress, than to enlighten and exalt the young Poetical Student. The Poetics of Scaliger, which are little more than a laboured panegyric of Virgil, would lead him to regard the *Æneid* as the only standard of

K 4

perfection;

perfection; and the more elegant and accomplished Vida inculcates the same pusillanimous lesson, though in spirited and harmonious verse:

Unus hic ingenio præstanti gentis Achivæ
 Divinos vates longè superavit, et arte,
 Aureus immortale sonans: stupet ipsa pavetque,
 Quamvis ingentem miretur Græcia Homerum.

— — — — —
 Ergo ipsum ante alios animo venerare Maronem,
 Atque unum sequere, utque potes, vestigia ferva!

VIDA.

See how the Grecian Bards, at distance thrown,
 With reverence bow to this distinguish'd son;
 Immortal sounds his golden lines impart,
 And nought can match his Genius but his Art:
 E'en Greece turns pale and trembles at his fame,
 Which shades the lustre of her Homer's name.

— — — — —
 Hence, sacred Virgil from thy soul adore
 Above the rest, and to thy utmost power
 Pursue the glorious paths he struck before.

}

PITT's Translation.

A Critic,

A Critic, who lately rose to great eminence in our own country, has endeavoured by a more singular method to damp the ardour of inventive Genius, and to annihilate the hopes of all who would aspire to the praise of originality in this higher species of poetical composition. He has attempted to establish a Triumvirate in the Epic world, with a perpetuity of dominion. Every reader who is conversant with modern criticism, will perceive that I allude to the following passage in the famous Dissertation on the sixth Book of Virgil:—"Just as Virgil rivalled Homer, so Milton emulated both of them. He found Homer possessed of the province of Morality; Virgil of Politics; and nothing left for him but that of Religion. This he seized, as aspiring to share with them in the government of the Poetic world: and, by means of the superior dignity of his subject, hath gotten to the head of that Triumvirate, which took so many ages in forming. These are the three species of the Epic Poem; for its largest sphere is *human action*, which can be considered

but

but in a *moral*, political, or religious view : and These the three *Makers* ; for each of their Poems was struck out at a heat, and came to perfection from its first essay. Here then the grand scene was closed, and all farther improvements of the Epic at an end."

I apprehend that few critical remarks contain more *absurdity* (to use the favourite expression of the author I have quoted) than the preceding lines. Surely Milton is himself a proof that *human action* is not the largest sphere of the Epic Poem ; and as to Virgil, his most passionate admirers must allow, that in subject and design he is much less of an original than Camoens or Lucan. But such a critical statute of limitation, if I may call it so, is not less pernicious than absurd. To disfigure the sphere of Imagination with these capricious and arbitrary zones, is an injury to science. Such Criticism, instead of giving spirit and energy to the laudable ambition of a youthful Poet, can only lead him to start like Macbeth at unreal mockery, and to exclaim, when he is invited
by

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by Genius to the banquet, "The Table's full!"

NOTE II. VERSE 77.

*Thus, at their banquets, fabling Greeks rehearse
The fancied origin of sacred Verse.]* For this fable, such as it is, I am indebted to a passage in Athenæus, which the curious reader may find in the close of that fanciful and entertaining compiler, page 701 of Casaubon's edition.

NOTE III. VERSE 207.

*Why did the Epic Muse's silent lyre
Shrink from those feats that summon'd all her fire?]*
I have ventured to suppose that Greece produced no worthy successor of Homer, and that her exploits against the Persians were not celebrated by any Poet in a manner suitable to so sublime a subject:—yet an author named Chærilus is said to have recorded those triumphs of his country in
verse,

verse, and to have pleased the Athenians so highly, as to obtain from them a public and pecuniary reward. He is supposed to have been a cotemporary of the historian Herodotus. But from the general silence of the more early Greek writers concerning the merit of this Poet, we may, I think, very fairly conjecture that his compositions were not many degrees superior to those of his unfortunate namesake, who frequented the court of Alexander the Great, and is said to have sung the exploits of his Sovereign, on the curious conditions of receiving a piece of gold for every good verse, and a box on the ear for every bad one. The old Scholiast on Horace, who has preserved this idle story, concludes it by saying, that the miserable Bard was beat to death in consequence of his contract. Some eminent modern Critics have indeed attempted to vindicate the reputation of the more early Chærilus, who is supposed to be confounded, both by Horace himself, and afterwards by Scaliger, with the Chærilus rewarded by

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by Alexander. Voffius *, in particular, appears a warm advocate in his behalf, and appeals to various fragments of the ancient Bard preserved by Aristotle, Strabo, and others, and to the testimony of Plutarch in his favour. But on consulting the fragments he has referred to, they rather fortify than remove my conjecture. The scrap preserved by Aristotle in his Rhetoric is only half a verse, and quoted without any commendation of its author. The two citations in Strabo amount to little more. The curious reader may also find in Athenæus an Epitaph on Sardanapalus, attributed to this Poet; who is mentioned by the same author as peculiarly addicted to the grosser excesses of the table.—Let us now return to that Chærilus whom Horace has “damn’d to everlasting fame.” The judicious and elegant Roman Satirist seems remarkably unjust in paying a compliment to the poetical judgment of his patron Augustus, at the expence of the Macedonian hero. Alexander appears to have possessed much

* De Historicis Græcis.

more poetical spirit, and a higher relish for poetry, than the cold-blooded Octavius. It is peculiarly unfair, to urge his liberality to a poor Poet, as a proof that he wanted critical discernment, when he had himself so thoroughly vindicated the delicacy of his taste, by the enthusiastic Bon-mot, That he had rather be the Therfites of Homer than the Achilles of Chærilus.

N O T E I V . . V E R S E 231.

*When grave Bossu by System's studied laws
The Grecian Bard's ideal picture draws.]*

Though Bossu is called “ the best explainer of Aristotle, and one of the most learned and judicious of modern critics,” by a writer for whose opinions I have much esteem, I cannot help thinking that his celebrated Essay on Epic Poetry is very ill calculated either to guide or to inspirit a young Poet. The absurdity of his advice concerning the mode of forming the fable, by chusing a moral, inventing the incidents, and then searching history for names to suit them, has been sufficiently exposed: and as to his leading
idea,

idea, concerning the design of Homer in the composition of the *Iliad* and *Odyſſey*, I apprehend moſt poetical readers muſt feel that he is probably miſtaken; for it is a conjectural point, and placed beyond the poſſibility of deciſion. Perhaps few individuals differ more from each other in their modes of thinking, by the force of education and of national manners, than a modern French Critic and an early Poet of Greece; yet the former will often pretend, with the moſt deciſive air, to lay open the ſenſorium of an ancient Bard, and to count every link in the chain of his ideas. Thoſe who are moſt acquainted with the movements of imagination, will acknowledge the ſteps of this airy power to be ſo light and evaneſcent in their nature, that perhaps a Poet himſelf, in a few years after finiſhing his work, might be utterly unable to recollect the exact train of thought, or the various minute occurrences, which led him to the general deſign, or directed him in the particular parts of his poem But, in ſpite of the interval of ſo many centuries,

centuries, the decisive magic of criticism can call up all the shadows of departed thought that ever existed in his brain, and display, with a most astonishing clearness, the precise state of his mind in the moment of composition.

“Homere,” says Bossu, “* voyoit les Grecs pour qui il écrivoit, diviséz en autant d’etats qu’ils avoient de villes considerables : chacune faisoit un corps à part & avoit sa forme de gouvernement independamment de toutes les autres. Et toute-fois ces etats differens estoient souvent obligéz de se reünir comme en un seul corps contre leurs ennemis communs. Voila sans doute deux sortes de gouvernemens bien differens, pour estre commodement reunis en un corps de morale, & en un seul poëme.

“Le poëte en a donc fait deux fables séparées. L’une est pour toute la Grece reünie en un seul corps, mais composée de parties independantes les unes des autres, comme elles estoient en effet ;

* Livre i. chap. 8.

& l'autre est pour chaque etat particulier, tels qu'ils estoient pendant la paix, sans ce premier rapport & sans la necessité de se réunir.

“ Homere a donc pris pour le fond de sa fable, cette grande verité, que la Mesintelligence des princes ruine leurs propres etats.”

On the *Odyssley* Bossu remarks, “ Que la verité qui sert de fond à cette fiction, & qui avec elle compose la fable, est, que l'absence d'une personne hors de chez soi, ou qui n'a point l'œil à ce qui s'y fait, y cause de grands desordres *.”

On the mature consideration of these two moral axioms, the Critic supposes the sublime Bard to have begun his respective Poems ; for Homer, continues he, “ † n'avoit point d'autre dessein que de former agreablement les mœurs de ses Citoïens, en leur proposant, comme dit Horace, ce qui est utile ou pernicieux, ce qui est honnete

* Livre i. chap. 10.

† Livre i. chap. 13.

ou ce qui ne l'est pas : - - - il n'a entrepris de raconter aucune action particuliere d'Achille ou d'Ulyffe. Il a fait la fable et le dessein de ses poemes, sans penser à ces princes ; & ensuite il leur a fait l'honneur de donner leurs noms aux heros qu'il avoit feints."

The preceding remarks of this celebrated Critic have been frequently admired as an ingenious conjecture, which most happily illustrates the real purpose of Homer. To me they appear so much the reverse, that if I ventured to adopt any decided opinion on a point so much darkened by the clouds of antiquity, I should rather incline to the idea which Bossu affects to explode, and suppose the Poems of Homer intended panegyrics on the very princes whom the Critic affirms he never thought of while he was designing the works which have made them immortal.

There is a striking passage on this subject in a dialogue of Plato, which I shall enlarge upon, for two reasons : 1st, As it proves that the latter
persuasion

persuasion concerning the purpose of Homer was entertained at Athens; and 2dly, Because it gives me a pleasing opportunity of supporting the learned Madame Dacier against an ill-grounded censure of a late English critic. In her Preface to the *Odyssey*, she asserts, that the judgment of antiquity decided in favour of the *Iliad*; and she appeals to part of the sentence in Plato, to which I have alluded, as a proof of her assertion. Mr. Wood, in a note to the Introduction of his Essay on Homer, endeavours to shew the insufficiency of this proof; and still farther, to convince us that Madame Dacier was utterly mistaken in her sense of the passage to which she appealed. If he ventures to contradict this learned lady, he does not however insult her with that insolent pertness with which she is frequently treated in the notes to Pope's Homer; and which, for the honour of our English Poet, I will not suppose to be his. But though Mr. Wood endeavours to support his opinion by argument, I apprehend that he is

himself mistaken, and that Madame Dacier is perfectly right in understanding the words of Socrates in their literal sense, without the least mixture of irony. It is true, indeed, that the aim of Socrates, in the course of the dialogue, is to ridicule the presumption and ignorance of the sophist Hippias, in the most ironical manner; but the particular speech on which Madame Dacier founds her opinion, is a plain and simple address to Eudicus, before he enters on his debate with the Sophist. It turns on the most simple circumstance, the truth of which Eudicus could hardly be ignorant of, namely, the sentiments of his own father concerning the Poems of Homer. As these sentiments are such as I believe most admirers of the ancient Bard have entertained on the point in question, I perfectly agree with Madame Dacier in thinking that Socrates means to be literal and serious, when he says to Eudicus, Τε σὲ πατρός Αθημαντου ηκον οτι η Ιλιας καλλιον ειη ποιημα ὦ Ομηρῳ η η Οδυσσεια· τούτου δε καλλιον

οσω αμεινων Αχιλλεως Οδυσσεως ειη* εκατερον
 γαρ των ποιηματων το μεν εις Οδυσσεα εφη
 πεποιησθαι, το δ' εις Αχιλλεα. Plat. Hip. min.
 edit. Serrani, tom. i. p. 363. "I have heard
 your father Apemantus say, that the Iliad of
 Homer was a finer poem than his Odyssey, and
 as far surpassed it in excellence as the virtue of
 Achilles surpassed the virtue of Ulysses; for those
 two poems, he said, were purposely composed in
 honour of those two heroes: the Odyssey, to
 shew the virtues of Ulysses; the Iliad, those of
 Achilles."—Plato's Lesser Hippias, translated by
 Sydenham, page 13.

Let us now return to Bossu; whose opinion
 concerning the purpose of Homer we may venture
 to oppose, supported as it is by an ingenious in-
 terpretation of some ambiguous passages in the
 Poetics of Aristotle; and this opposition may be
 grounded, not so much on the sentence which I have
 quoted from Plato, as on the probable conduct of
 Epic composition in the early ages of poetry. In

such periods as produced the talents of Virgil and of Dryden, when all the arts of refined flattery were perfectly understood, we can easily conceive that they might both be tempted to compliment the reigning monarch under the mask of such heroic names as history could supply, and their genius accommodate to their purpose. We find accordingly, that the Roman Bard is supposed to have drawn a flattering portrait of his Emperor in the character of Æneas, and that the English Poet has, with equal ingenuity, enwrapt the dissolute Charles the Second in the Jewish robes of King David. But in so rude an age as we must admit that of Homer to have been; when the Poet was certainly more the child of Nature than of Art; when he had no history to consult, perhaps no patron to flatter, and no critics to elude or obey; in such an age, may we not more naturally conjecture, that poetical composition was neither laboured in its form, nor deep in its design? that, instead of being the slow and systematic

tematic product of political reasoning, it was the quick and artless offspring of a strong and vivifying fancy, which, brooding over the tales of tradition, soon raised them into such life and beauty, as must satisfy and enchant a warlike and popular audience, ever ready to listen with delight to the heroic feats of their ancestors.

If the learned Bossu appears unfortunate in his system concerning the purpose of Homer, he may be thought still more so in his attempt to analyse the Divinities of Virgil; for, to throw new light on the convention of the Gods, in the opening of the tenth *Æneid*, he very seriously informs us, that “* Venus is divine mercy, or the love of God towards virtuous men, and Juno his justice.”

I cannot conclude these very free strictures on a celebrated author, without bearing a pleasing testimony to the virtues of the man.—Bossu is allowed by the biographers of his country to have been remarkable for the mildest manners and

* Book v. chap. i.

most amiable disposition ; totally free from that imperious and bigotted attachment to speculative opinions, which the science he cultivated is so apt to produce. He endeared himself to Boileau by a generous act of friendship, that led to an intimacy between them, which was dissolved only by the death of the former, in 1680.

NOTE V. VERSE 244.

Imputes to Virgil his own dark conceit.] As it requires much leisure to examine, and more skill to unravel, an intricate hypothesis, twisted into a long and laboured chain of quotation and argument, the Dissertation on the sixth Book of Virgil remained for some time unrefuted. The public very quietly acquiesced in the strange position of its author, "That Æneas's adventure to the Infernal Shades, is no other than a figurative description of his initiation into the Mysteries ; and particularly a very exact one of the spectacles of the Eleusinian." At length a superior but anonymous

mous Critic arose, who, in one of the most judicious and spirited essays that our nation has produced on a point of classical literature, completely overturned this ill-founded edifice, and exposed the arrogance and futility of its assuming architect. The Essay I allude to is intitled "Critical Observations on the Sixth Book of the *Æneid*;" printed for Elmsly, 1770: and as this little publication is, I believe, no longer to be purchased, the curious reader may thank me for transcribing a few of its most striking passages.

Having ridiculed, with great spirit and propriety, Warburton's general idea of the *Æneid* as a political institute, and his ill-supported assertion, that both the ancient and modern poets afforded Virgil a pattern for introducing the Mysteries into this famous episode, the author proceeds to examine how far the Critic's hypothesis of initiation may be supported or overthrown by the text of the Poet. "It is," says he, "from extrinsecal circumstances that we may expect the discovery of Virgil's allegory. Every one of these circumstances

stances persuades me, that Virgil described a real, not a mimic world, and that the scene lay in the Infernal Shades, and not in the Temple of Ceres.

“ The singularity of the Cumæan shores must be present to every traveller who has once seen them. To a superstitious mind, the thin crust, vast cavities, sulphureous steams, poisonous exhalations, and fiery torrents, may seem to trace out the narrow confine of the two worlds. The lake Avernus was the chief object of religious horror ; the black woods which surrounded it, when Virgil first came to Naples, were perfectly suited to feed the superstition of the people *. It was generally believed, that this deadly flood was the entrance of Hell † ; and an oracle was once established on its banks, which pretended, by magic rites, to call up the departed spirits ‡. Æneas,

* Strabo, l. v. p. 168.

† Sil, Ital. l. xii.

‡ Diod. Siculus, l. iv. p. 267. edit. Wesseling.

who revolved a more daring enterprize, addresses himself to the priests of those dark regions. Their conversation may perhaps inform us whether an initiation, or a descent to the Shades, was the object of this enterprize. She endeavours to deter the hero, by setting before him all the dangers of his rash undertaking :

—— Facilis descensus Averni ;
 Noctes atque dies patet atri janua Ditis :
 Sed revocare gradum, superasque evadere ad
 auras,
 Hoc opus, hic labor est *.

“ These particulars are absolutely irreconcilable with the idea of initiation, but perfectly agreeable to that of a real descent. That every step and every instant may lead us to the grave, is a melancholy truth. The Mysteries were only open at stated times, a few days at most in the

* *Æneid* vi. 126.

course of a year. The mimic descent of the Mysteries was laborious and dangerous, the return to light easy and certain. In real death this order is inverted :

——— *Pauci quos æquus amavit*

*Jupiter, aut ardens evexit ad æthera virtus,
Diis geniti, potuere *.*

These heroes, as we learn from the Speech of Æneas, were Hercules, Orpheus, Castor and Pollux, Theseus, and Pirithous. Of all these antiquity believed, that, before their death, they had seen the habitations of the dead ; nor indeed will any of the circumstances tally with a supposed initiation. The adventure of Eurydice, the alternate life of the Brothers, and the forcible intrusion of Alcides, Theseus, and Pirithous, would mock the endeavours of the most subtle critic, who should try to melt them down into his

* Æneid vi. 129.

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favourite Mysteries. The exploits of Hercules, who triumphed over the King of Terrors—

Tartareum ille manu custodem in vincla petivit
Ipse a folio regis, traxitque trementem *.

was a wild imagination of the Greeks †; but it was the duty of ancient Poets to adopt and embellish these popular traditions; and it is the interest of every man of taste to acquiesce in *their poetical fictions*.”

“Virgil has borrowed, as usual, from Homer his episode of the Infernal Shades, and, as usual, has infinitely improved what the Grecian had invented. If among a profusion of beauties I durst venture to point out the most striking beauties of the sixth Book, I should perhaps observe, 1. That after accompanying the hero through the silent realms of Night and Chaos, we see, with astonishment and pleasure, a new creation bursting upon us. 2. That we examine, with a delight

* *Æneid* vi. 395.

† Homer *Odyss.* l. xi. ver. 623. *Apoll. Bib.* l. ii. c. 5.

which springs from the love of virtue, the just empire of Minos, in which the apparent irregularities of the present system are corrected; where the patriot who died for his country is happy, and the tyrant who oppressed it is miserable. 3. As we interest ourselves in the hero's fortunes, we share his feelings:—the melancholy Palinurus, the wretched Deiphobus, the indignant Dido, the Grecian kings, who tremble at his presence, and the venerable Anchises, who embraces his pious son, and displays to his sight the future glories of his race: all these objects affect us with a variety of pleasing sensations.

“Let us for a moment obey the mandate of our great Critic, and consider these awful scenes as a mimic shew, exhibited in the Temple of Ceres, by the contrivance of the priest, or, if he pleases, of the legislator. Whatever was animated (I appeal to every reader of taste), whatever was terrible, or whatever was pathetic, evaporates into lifeless allegory:

———— Tenuem

———— Tenuem sine viribus umbram.

————— Dat inania verba,

Dat sine mente sonum, gressusque effingit euntis.

The end of philosophy is truth ; the end of poetry is pleasure. I willingly adopt any interpretation which adds new beauties to the original ; I assist in persuading myself that it is just, and could almost shew the same indulgence to the Critic's as to the Poet's fiction. But should a grave Doctor lay out fourscore pages in explaining away the sense and spirit of Virgil, I should have every inducement to believe that Virgil's soul was very different from the Doctor's."

Having shewn, in this spirited manner, how far the hypothesis of the Critic is inconsistent with particular passages, and with the general character of the Poet, the Essayist proceeds to allege " two simple reasons, which persuade him that Virgil has not revealed the secret of the Eleusinian mysteries : the first is *his ignorance*, and the
second

second *his discretion*.” The author then proves, by very ingenious historical arguments, 1st, That it is probable the Poet was never initiated himself; and, 2dly, That if he were so, it is more probable that he would not have violated the laws both of religion and of honour, in betraying the secret of the Mysteries; particularly, as that species of profanation is mentioned with abhorrence by a cotemporary Poet :

———— Vetabo, qui Cereris sacrum
 Vulgârit arcanæ, sub iisdem
 Sit trabibus, fragilemque mecum
 Solvat phaselum.

HOR. l. iii. od. 2.

When Horace composed the Ode which contains the preceding passage, “the *Æneid* (continues my author) and particularly the sixth Book, were already known to the public *. The detestation of the wretch who reveals the Mysteries of Ceres,

* Donat. in Virgil. Propert. l. ii. el. xxv. v. 66.

though

though expressed in general terms, must be applied by all Rome to the author of the sixth Book of the *Æneid*. Can we seriously suppose that Horace would have branded with such wanton infamy one of the men in the world whom he loved and honoured the most * ?

“Nothing remains to say, except that Horace was himself ignorant of his friend’s allegorical meaning ; which the Bishop of Gloucester has since revealed to the world. It may be so ; yet, for my own part, I should be very well satisfied with understanding Virgil no better than Horace did.”

Such is the forcible reasoning of this ingenious and spirited writer. I have been tempted to transcribe these considerable portions of his Work, by an idea (perhaps an ill-founded one) that the circulation of his little Pamphlet has not been equal to its merit. But if it has been in any degree neglected by our country, it has not escaped the re-

* Hor. l. i. od. 3. l. i. serm. v. ver. 39, &c.

searches, or wanted the applause, of a learned and judicious foreigner. Professor Heyne, the late accurate and accomplished Editor of Virgil, has mentioned it in his Comments to the sixth Book of the *Æneid*, with the honour it deserves. He remarks, indeed, that the Author has censured the learned Prelate with some little acrimony; “*Paullò acrius quam velis.*” But what lover of poetry, unbiaſſed by personal connection, can speak of Warburton without some marks of indignation? If I have also alluded to this famous Commentator with a contemptuous asperity, it arises from the persuasion that he has sullied the page of every Poet whom he pretended to illustrate; and that he frequently degraded the useful and generous profession of Criticism into a mean instrument of personal malignity: or (to use the more forcible language of his greatest antagonist) that he “invested himself in the high office of Inquisitor General and Supreme Judge of the Opinions of the Learned; which he assumed and exercised with a ferocity and despotism without

example in the Republic of Letters, and hardly to be paralleled among the disciples of Dominic *." It is the just lot of tyrants to be detested; and of all usurpers, the literary despot is the least excusable, as he has not the common tyrannical plea of necessity or interest to alledge in his behalf; for the prevalence of *his edicts* will be found to sink in proportion to the arbitrary tone with which they are pronounced. The fate of Warburton is a striking instance of this important truth. What havock has the course of very few years produced in that pile of imperious criticism which he had heaped together! Many of his notes on Shakespeare have already resigned their place to the superior comments of more accomplished Critics; and perhaps the day is not far distant, when the volumes of Pope himself will cease to be a repository for the lumber of his

* Letter to Warburton by a late Professor, &c. p. 9. 2d edition.

friend. The severest enemies of Warburton must indeed allow, that several of his remarks on his Poetical Patron are entitled to preservation, by their use or beauty ; but the greater part, I apprehend, are equally destitute of both : and how far the Critic was capable of disgracing the Poet, must be evident to every reader who recollects that the nonsense in the Essay on Criticism, where Pegasus is made to *snatch a grace*, which is justly censured by Dr. Warton, was first introduced into the poem by an arbitrary transposition of the editor.

Though arrogance is perhaps the most striking and characteristical defect in the composition of this assuming Commentator, he had certainly other critical failings of considerable importance ; and it may possibly be rendering some little service to the art which he professed, to investigate the peculiarities in this singular writer, which conspire to plunge him in the crowd of those *evanescent critics* (if I may use such an expression) whom

whom his friend Pope beheld in so clear a vision,
that he seems to have given us a prophetic
portrait of his own Commentator :

Critics I saw, that others' names efface,
And fix their own, with labour, in the place ;
Their own, like others', soon their place re-
sign'd,
Or disappear'd, and left the first behind.

I shall therefore hazard a few farther observa-
tions, not only on this famous Critic of our age
and country, but on the two greater names of
antiquity, to each of whom he has been de-
clared superior by the partial voice of enthusiastic
friendship. I wish not to offend his most zea-
lous adherents ; and, though I cannot but con-
sider him as a literary usurper, I speak of him as
a great Historian said of more exalted tyrants,
sine ira et studio, quorum causas procul habeo.
—— There seem to be three natural endow-
ments requisite in the formation of an accom-

plished critic ; — strong understanding, lively imagination, and refined sensibility. The first was the characteristic of Aristotle ; and, by the consent of all ages, he is allowed to have possessed it in a superlative degree. May I be pardoned for the opinion, that he enjoyed but a very moderate portion of the *other two* ? I would not absolutely say, that he had neither Fancy nor Feeling : but that his imagination was *not brilliant*, and that his sensibility was not exquisite, may, I think, be fairly presumed from the general tenor of his prose ; nor does the little relique of his poetry contradict the idea. The two qualities in which Aristotle may be supposed defective, were the very two which peculiarly distinguish Longinus ; who certainly wanted not understanding, though he might not possess the philosophical sagacity of the Stagyrte. When considered in every point of view, he appears the most consummate character among the Critics of antiquity. If Warburton bore any resemblance to either of these mighty names, I apprehend it must

must be to the former, and perhaps in imagination he was superior to Aristotle : but, of the three qualities which I have ventured to consider as requisite in the perfect Critic, I conceive him to have been miserably deficient in the last, and certainly the most essential of the three ; for, as the great Commentator of Horace has philosophically and truly remarked, in a note to that Poet, “ Feeling, or Sentiment, is not only the surest, but the sole ultimate arbiter of works of genius *.” A man may possess an acute understanding and a lively imagination, without being a sound Critic ; and this truth perhaps cannot be more clearly shewn than in the writings of Warburton. His understanding was undoubtedly acute, his imagination was lively ; but Imagination and Sentiment are by no means synonymous : and he certainly wanted those finer feelings, which constitute accuracy of discernment, and a perfect perception of literary excellence. In consequence

* Notes on the Epistle to Augustus, ver. 210.

of this defect, instead of seizing the real sense and intended beauties of an author, he frequently followed the caprices of his own active fancy, which led him in quest of secret meanings and mysterious allusions ; these he readily found, and his powers of understanding enabled him to dress them up in a plausible and specious form, and to persuade many readers that he was (what he believed himself to be) the restorer of genuine Criticism. As a farther proof that he was destitute of refined sensibility, I might alledge the peculiarity of his diction, which, as Dr. Johnson has very justly remarked, is coarse and impure. Perhaps it may be found, that in proportion as authors have enjoyed the quality which I suppose him to have wanted, they have been more or less distinguished by the ease, the elegance, and the beauty of their language : were I required to fortify this conjecture by examples, I should produce the names of Virgil and Racine, of Fenelon and Addison — that Addison, who, though insulted by the Com-
mentator

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mentator of Pope with the names of an indifferent Poet and a worse Critic, was, I think, as much superior to his insulter in critical taste, and in solidity of judgment, as he confessedly was in the harmony of his style, and in all the finer graces of beautiful composition.

NOTE VI. VERSE 257.

*'Tis said by one, who, with this candid claim,
Has gain'd no fading wreath of critic fame.]*

These, and the six subsequent lines, allude to the following passage in Dr. Warton's Essay on Pope:

" I conclude these reflections with a remarkable fact:—In no polished nation, after Criticism has been much studied, and the rules of writing established, has any very extraordinary work ever appeared. This has visibly been the case in Greece, in Rome, and in France, after Aristotle, Horace, and Boileau had written their Arts of Poetry. In our own country, the rules of the Drama, for instance,

were never more completely understood than at present; yet what uninteresting, though faultless, Tragedies have we lately seen? so much better is our judgment than our execution. How to account for the fact here mentioned, adequately and justly, would be attended with all those difficulties that await discussions relative to the productions of the human mind, and to the delicate and secret causes that influence them; whether or no the natural powers be not confined and debilitated by that timidity and caution which is occasioned by a rigid regard to the dictates of art; or whether that philosophical, that geometrical, and systematical spirit so much in vogue, which has spread itself from the sciences even into polite literature, by consulting only *reason*, has not diminished and destroyed *sentiment*, and made our poets write from and to the *head*, rather than the heart; or whether, lastly, when just models, from which the rules have necessarily been drawn, have once appeared, succeeding writers, by vainly and ambitiously

bitiously striving to surpass those just models, and to shine and surprise, do not become stiff and forced, and affected in their thoughts and diction." Warton's Essay, page 209, 3d edition.

— I admire this ingenious and modest reasoning; but, for the honour of that severer art, which this pleasing writer has the happy talent to enliven and embellish, I will venture to start some doubts concerning the fact itself for which he endeavours to account. Perhaps our acquaintance with those writings of Greece and Rome, which were subsequent to Aristotle and Horace, is not sufficiently perfect to decide the point either way in respect to those countries. But with regard to France, may we not assert, that her poetical productions, which arose after the publication of Boileau's Didactic Essay, are at least equal, if not superior, to those which preceded that period? If the *Henriade* of Voltaire is not a fine Epic poem, it is allowed to be the best which the French have to boast; not to mention the
dramatic

dramatic works of that extraordinary and universal author. If this remarkable fact may indeed be found true, I should rather suppose it to arise from the irritable nature of the poetic spirit, so peculiarly averse to restraint and controul. The Bard who could gallop his Pegasus over a free and open plain, might be eager to engage in so pleasing an exercise; but he who observed the direction-posts so thickly and so perversely planted, that, instead of assisting his career, they must probably occasion his fall, would easily be tempted to descend from his steed, and to decline the course. Let me illustrate this conjecture by a striking fact, in the very words of the Poet just mentioned, who was by no means deficient in poetical confidence, and who has left us the following anecdote of himself, in that pleasing little anonymous work, intitled, *Commentaire Historique sur les Oeuvres de l'Auteur de la Henriade*. "Il lut un jour plusieurs chants de ce poeme chez le jeune Président de Maisons, son intime ami. On l'impatienta

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l'impatience par des objections ; il jeta son manuscrit dans le feu. Le Président Hénaut l'en retira avec peine. “ Souvenez vous (lui dit Mr. Hénaut) dans une de ses lettres, que c'est moi qui ai sauvé la Henriade, et qu'il m'en a couté une belle paire de manchettes.”

To return to the Essay on Pope.—I rejoice that the amiable Critic has at length obliged the public with the conclusion of his most engaging and ingenious work : he has the singular talent to instruct and to please even those readers who are most ready to revolt from the opinion which he endeavours to establish ; and he has in some degree atoned for that excess of severity which his first volume discovered, and which sunk the reputation of Pope in the eyes of many, who judge not for themselves, even far below that mortifying level to which he meant to reduce it. Had Pope been alive, to add this spirited essay to the bundle of writings against himself, which he is said to have collected, he must have felt, that,

like

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like the dagger of Brutus, it gave the most painful blow, from the character of the assailant :

“All the conspirators, save only he,
Did that they did in envy of great Cæsar ;
He, only, in a general honest thought,
And common good to all, made one of them.”

Yet Pope ascended not the throne of Poetry by usurpation, but was seated there by a legal title ; of which I shall speak farther in a subsequent note.

NOTE VII. VERSE 359.

*His hallow'd subject, by that Law forbid,
Might still have laid in silent darkness hid.]*

Boileau's Art of Poetry made its first appearance in 1673, six years after the publication of Paradise Lost. The verses of the French Poet to which I have particularly alluded, are these :

C'est

C'est donc bien vainement que nos auteurs
décus,

Bannissant de leurs vers ces ornemens reçus,
Pensent faire agir Dieu, ses saints, et ses prophètes,

Comme ces dieux éclos du cerveau des Poètes ;
Mettent à chaque pas le lecteur en enfer ;
N'offrent rien qu' Astaroth, Belzebuth, Lucifer.

De la foi d'un Chrétien les mystères terribles
D'ornemens egayés, ne sont point susceptibles.
L'Evangile à l'esprit n' offre de tous côtés
Que penitence à faire, et tourmens mérités :
Et de vos fictions le mélange coupable,
Même à ses vérités donne l' air de la fable.
Et quel objet enfin à présenter aux yeux
Que le Diable toujours hurlant contre les cieux,
Qui de votre héros veut rabaisser la gloire,
Et souvent avec Dieu balance la victoire.

Poétique de DESPREAUX,
chant iii. ver. 193, &c.

The preceding lines, which are said to have been levelled at the Clovis of Desmaretz, appear so pointed against the subject of Milton, that we might almost believe them intended as a satire on our divine Bard. There is nothing in Boileau's admirable Didactic Essay so liable to objection as the whole passage concerning Epic poetry. His patronage of the old Pagan divinities, and his oblique recommendation of Classical heroes, are alike exceptionable. Even a higher name than Boileau has failed in framing precepts for the Epic Muse. The maxims delivered by Tasso himself, in his Discourse on Epic poetry, are so far from perfect, that an agreeable and judicious French critic has very justly said of him, "*S'il eût mis sa theorie en pratique, son poeme n'auroit pas tant de charmes **." I am not so vain as to think of succeeding in the point where these immortal authors have failed; and I must beg my

* Marmontel Poétique Française.

reader to remember, that the present work is by no means intended as a code of laws for the Epic poet ; it is not my design

To write receipts how poems may be made ;

for I think the writer who would condescend to frame this higher species of composition according to the exact letter of any directions whatever, may be most properly referred to that admirable receipt for an Epic poem, with which Martinus Scriblerus will happily supply him. My serious desire is to examine and refute the prejudices which have produced, as I apprehend, the neglect of the Heroic Muse : I wish to kindle in our Poets a warmer sense of national honour, with ambition to excel in the noblest province of poesy. If my Essay should excite that generous enthusiasm in the breast of any young poetic genius, so far from wishing to confine him by any arbitrary dictates of my own imagination, I should rather say to him, in the words of Dante's Virgil,

Non aspettar mio dir più, nè mio cenno
 Libero, dritto, sano è tuo arbitrio,
 E fallo fora non fare a suo senno.

NOTE VIII. VERSE 377.

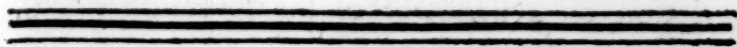
Who scorn'd all limits to his work assign'd,

Save by th' inspiring God who rul'd his mind.]

“On foot, with a lance in his hand, the Emperor himself led the solemn procession, and directed the line, which was traced as the boundary of the destined capital; till the growing circumference was observed with astonishment by the assistants, who at length ventured to observe, that he had already exceeded the most ample measure of a great city. “I shall still advance,” replied Constantine, “till he, the invisible guide who marches before me, thinks proper to stop.”

GIBBON, Vol. II. page 11.

End of the Notes to the First Epistle.



N O T E S

T O T H E

S E C O N D E P I S T L E.



N O T E I. V E R S E 28.

WE see thy fame traduc'd by Gallic wit.] Homer, like most transcendent characters, has found detractors in every age. We learn from a passage in the Life of Socrates, by Diogenes Laertius, that the great Poet had, in his life-time, an adversary named Sagaris, or Syagrus; and his calumniator Zoilus is proverbially distinguished. In

the Greek Anthologia, there is a sepulchral inscription on a slanderer of the sovereign Bard, which, for its enthusiastic singularity, I shall present to the reader :

Εἰς Παρθενιον Φωκαεα εἰς Ὀμηρον παροι-
νησαντα.

.

Εἰ καὶ ὑπο χθονὶ κεῖται, ὁμῶς ἐτι καὶ κατὰ πισσαν

Τε μισρογλωσσεν χευατε Παρθενης,

Οὐνεκα Πιερίδεσσιν ἐνημεσε μυρία κείνα

Φλεγματα, καὶ μυσάρων ἀπλυσίνην ἐλεγῶν.

Ἡλασε καὶ μανίης ἐπὶ δὴ τοσον, ὥστ' ἀγορευσαι

Πηλον Ὀδυσσεὶν καὶ βατον Ἰλιάδα.

Τοὶ γὰρ ὑποζοφιασιν Ἐρινυσὶν ἀρμεσον ἦπται

Κωκυτε, κλοιῷ λαιμον ἀπαγχομενος.

Anthologia, p. 70. Edit. Oxon. 1766.

On Parthenius the Phocensian, who calumniated
Homer.

Here, though deep-buried he can rail no more,
Pour burning pitch, on base Parthenius pour ;
Who on the sacred Muses dar'd to spirt
His frothy venom and poetic dirt ;
Who said of Homer, in his frantic scorn,
The *Odyſſey* was mud, the *Iliad* thorn ;
For this, dark Furies, in your snakes enroll,
And through *Cocytus* drag the fland'rous soul.

Parthenius, say the Commentators, was a disciple of Dionysius of Alexandria, who flourished under Nero and Trajan. Erycius, the author of the inscription, is supposed to have lived in the same age.—Among the modern adversaries of Homer, the French are most remarkable for their severity and injustice: nor is it surprising, that the nation which has displayed the faintest sparks of Epic fire, should be the most solicitous to reduce the oppressive splendor of this exalted lumi-

nary. The most depreciating remarks on genius, in every walk, are generally made by those who are the least able to prove its rivals; and often, perhaps, not so much from the prevalence of envious malignity, as from the want of vivid and delicate perception. The merits and the failings of Homer were agitated in France with all the heat and acrimony of a theological dispute. Madame Dacier distinguished herself in the contest by her uncommon talents and erudition: she combated for the Grecian Bard with the spirit of Minerva defending the father of the Gods. It must however be confessed, that she sometimes overstepped the modesty of wisdom, and caught, unwarily, the scolding tone of Juno. It is indeed amusing, to observe a people, who pique themselves on their extreme politeness, and censure Homer for the gross behaviour of his Gods, engaging among themselves in a squabble concerning this very Poet, with all the unrefined animosity of his Olympian Synod. In the whole controversy there is nothing more worthy of remembrance
and

SECOND EPISTLE. 183

and of praise, than the lively elegance and the pleasing good-humour of Mr. de la Motte, who, though not one of the most exalted, was certainly one of the most amiable characters in the literary world ; and made a generous return to the severity of his female antagonist, by writing an ode in her praise. Voltaire has pointed out, with his usual spirit, the failings of La Motte in his Abridgement of the Iliad ; but he has frequently fallen himself into similar defects, and is equally unjust to Homer, against whom he has levelled the most bitter sarcasms both in prose and verse. Voltaire attacking Homer, is like Paris shooting his arrow at the heel of Achilles : the two Poets are as unequal as the two ancient Warriors ; yet Homer, like Achilles, may have his vulnerable spot : but with this happy difference, that although the shaft of ridicule, which is pointed against him, may be tinged with venom, its wound cannot be mortal. Perhaps no better answer can be made to all those who amuse themselves with writing against Homer, than the following reply of Ma-

dame Dacier to the Abbé Terrasson, who had attacked her favourite Bard in two abusive volumes :—" Que Monsieur l'Abbé Terrasson trouve Homere sot, ridicule, extravagant, ennuyeux, c'est son affaire, le public jugera si c'est un defect à Homere de deplaire à M. l'Abbé Terrasson, ou à M. l'Abbé Terrasson de ne pas gouter Homere."

N O T E I I . V E R S E 85.

*E'en Socrates himself, that purest Sage,
Imbib'd his Wisdom from thy moral page.]* Dio Chrysostom, in one of his orations, has called Socrates the disciple of Homer, and drawn a short parallel of their respective merits; observing, in honour of both, " Ομηρος ποιητης γεγονεν οιος εδεις αλλος, Σωκρατης δε φιλοσοφος."

DION. CHRYS. p. 559.

N O T E

NOTE III. VERSE 119.

How high soe'er she leads his daring flight, &c.]

I mean not to injure the dignity of Pindar by this assertion. Though Quinctilian, in drawing the character of the Grecian Lyric Poets, has given him high pre-eminence in that choir, we may, I think, very fairly conjecture that some odes of Alcæus and Stefichorus were not inferior to those of the Theban Bard, who is said to have been repeatedly vanquished in a poetical contest by his female antagonist Corinna. The absurd jealousy of our sex concerning literary talents, has led some eminent writers to question the merits of Corinna, as Olearius has observed, in his Dissertation on the female Poets of Greece. But her glory seems to have been fully established by the public memorial of her picture, exhibited in her native city, and adorned with a symbol of her victory. Pausanias, who saw it, supposes her to have been one of the handsomest women of her time; and the ingenuity of some Critics imputes her success

in

in the poetical contest to the influence of her beauty. They have taken some liberties less pardonable with her literary reputation; and, by their curious comments on a single Greek syllable, made the sublime Pindar call his fair rival *a Sow*; though the unfortunate word *συνεκαλει*, which may be twisted into that meaning, signifies, in its more obvious construction, that the Poet challenged his successful antagonist to a new trial of skill.—For a more minute account of this singular piece of criticism, I must refer the reader to the notes on Corinna, in the *Fragmenta Poëtiarum*, by Wolfius. Time has left us only a few diminutive scraps of Corinna's Poetry; but Plutarch, in his Treatise on the Glory of the Athenians, has preserved one of her critical Bon-mots, which may deserve to be repeated. That author asserts, that Corinna instructed Pindar in his youth, and advised him to adorn his composition with the embellishments of fable. The obedient Poet soon brought her some verses, in which he had followed her advice rather too freely; when his Tutress,

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smiling at his profusion, Τη χειρι δειν εφη
σπειρειν, αλλα μη ολω τω θυλακω.

NOTE IV. VERSE 126.

*Yet may not Judgment, with severe disdain,
Slight the young Rhodian's variegated strain.]*

Apollonius, surnamed the Rhodian from the place of his residence, is supposed to have been a native of Alexandria; where he is said to have recited some portion of his Poem, while he was yet a youth. Finding it ill received by his countrymen, he retired to Rhodes, where he is conjectured to have polished and completed his Work; supporting himself by the profession of Rhetoric, and receiving from the Rhodians the freedom of their city. He at length returned, with considerable honour, to the place of his birth, succeeding Eratosthenes in the care of the Alexandrian Library, in the reign of Ptolemy Euergetes, who ascended the throne of Egypt in the year before
Christ

Christ 246. That prince had been educated by the famous Aristarchus, and rivalled the preceding sovereigns of his liberal family in the munificent encouragement of learning. Apollonius was a disciple of the poet Callimachus; but their connection ended in the most violent enmity; which was probably owing to some degree of contempt expressed by Apollonius for the light compositions of his master. The learned have vainly endeavoured to discover the particulars of their quarrel.—The only Work of Apollonius which has descended to modern times, is his Poem, in four Books, on the Argonautic expedition. Both Longinus and Quintilian have assigned to this Work the mortifying character of Mediocrity: but there lies an appeal from the sentence of the most candid and enlightened Critics to the voice of Nature; and the merit of Apollonius has little to apprehend from the decision of this ultimate judge. His Poem abounds in animated description, and in passages of the
 most

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most tender and pathetic beauty. How finely painted is the first setting forth of the Argo ! and how beautifully is the wife of Chiron introduced, holding up the little Achilles in her arms, and shewing him to his father Peleus as he sailed along the shore ! But the chief excellence in our Poet, is the spirit and delicacy with which he has delineated the passion of love in his Medea. That Virgil thought very highly of his merit in this particular, is sufficiently evident from the minute exactness with which he has copied many tender touches of the Grecian Poet. Those who compare the third Book of Apollonius with the fourth of Virgil, may, I think, perceive not only that Dido has some features of Medea, but that the two Bards, however different in their reputation, resembled each other in their genius ; and that they both excel in delicacy and pathos.

NOTE

NOTE V. VERSE 190.

Virgil sinks loaded with their heavy praise.]

Scaliger appears to be the most extravagant of all the Critics who have lavished their undistinguishing encomiums on Virgil, by asserting that he alone is entitled to the name of Poet. Poetices, lib. iii. c. 2.—Though the opinion of Spence, and other modern Critics, concerning the character of Æneas, considered as an allegorical portrait of Augustus, seems to gain ground, yet it might perhaps be easy to overturn the ingenious conjectures and the fanciful reasoning by which that idea has been supported. This attempt would have the sanction of one of the most judicious Commentators of Virgil; for the learned Heyne expressly rejects all allegorical interpretation, and thinks it improbable that a Poet of so correct a judgment could have adopted a plan which must necessarily contract and cramp his powers.

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powers. He even ventures to assert, that if the character of Æneas was delineated as an allegorical portrait of Augustus, the execution of it is unhappy. The strongest argument which has been adduced to support this conjecture, is founded on the ingenious interpretation of the following passage in the opening of the third Georgic :

Primus ego in patriam mecum, modo vita superfit,

Aonio rediens deducam vertice Musas :

Primus Idumæas referam tibi, Mantua, palmas ;

Et viridi in campo templum de marmore ponam

Propter aquam, tardis ingens ubi flexibus errat

Mincius, et tenerâ prætexit arundine ripas.

In medio mihi Cæsar erit, templumque tenebit, &c.

These lines, in which Virgil expresses his intention of dedicating a temple to Augustus, have been considered as the *noblest allegory of ancient*

Poetry ;

Poetry *; and the great Critic who first started the idea, has expatiated, in the triumph of his discovery, on the *mysterious* beauties they contain: but the whole of this hypothesis is unfortunately built upon the rejection of three verses, which are pronounced unworthy of the Poet, and which, though found in every MS. the Critic claims a right of removing. A licence so extraordinary cannot even be justified by the talents of this accomplished writer: for if the less elegant passages of the ancient Poets might be removed at pleasure, their compositions would be exposed to the caprice of every fantastic commentator. The obvious and literal interpretation not only renders this violence unnecessary, but is more agreeable to the judgment of the Poet and the manners of his age. The custom of erecting real temples was so familiar to antiquity, that a Roman would never have suspected the edifice was to be raised only with poetical materials. We may even conjecture, from a line of Statius, that

* Hurd's Horace, vol. ii. page 44.

the Poet himself had a temple erected to his memory ; and, without any breach of probability, we may admit his intention of giving his living Emperor such a testimony of his gratitude. This adulation, though shocking to us, was too generally justified by example to oblige the Poet to palliate it by a fiction. He had before acquiesced in the divinity of his Imperial Patron, and had expressed the idea in its full sense :

Namque erit ille mihi semper *Deus*, illius aram
Sæpè tener nostris ab ovilibus imbuet agnus.

ECLOG. I.

Ingredere et votis jam *nunc* assuesce vocari.

GEORG. I.

Having made such an invocation in the beginning of his Work, was his *delicacy* afterwards to be shocked, and oblige him to pay a compliment under the disguise of an obscure conceit ? for that

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O

allegory

allegory must be allowed to be obscure, which had remained through so many ages unexplained. The unfortunate rejected lines, for whose elegance we do not contend, may at least be rescued from impropriety by a literal interpretation of the preceding passage; for, dismiss the conjectured allegory, and the chief objections against them remain no longer. If the phraseology be peculiar, it is at least supported by concurring MSS. The adjective *ardens* is sometimes undoubtedly joined to a word that does not denote a substance of heat or flame, as the Critic himself admits in the case of *ardentes hostes*, to which we may add the *verbum ardens* of Cicero *. As to the line which is

* A Friend who possesses much elegant erudition, has remarked to me, that the learned Prelate is particularly unhappy in his assertion respecting the use of the word *ardens*—an assertion completely contradicted by the following passages from Lucretius and Virgil:

Vulneris *ardenti* ut morfu premat ista dolore.

LUCRET. lib. iii. ver. 663.

Quos *ardens* evexit ad æthera virtus.

ÆNEID VI. 130.

said

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said to contain the most glaring note of illegitimacy,

Tithoni primâ quot abest ab origine Cæsar,

many reasons might induce the Poet to use the name of Tithonus, which at this distance of time it is not easy for us to conjecture. Perhaps he chose it to vary the expression of *Affaraci Proles*, which he had adopted in the preceding lines. The absurdity of the subject-matter, and the place in which it is introduced, that are insisted on as the principal objections, arise solely from the allegorical hypothesis: without it the construction will be plain and natural. The Poet expresses his intention of erecting a temple to Augustus, and expatiates on the magnificence with which it was to be adorned: he then returns to his present poetical subject—

Interea Dryadum sylvas saltusque sequamur—

and, having dwelt a little on that, to avoid too long a digression, very naturally resumes the

praises of the Emperor, by alluding to the sublimer song which he intended to devote to him *hereafter* :

Mox tamen ardentēs accingar dicere pugnas
Cæsarīs. —

Perhaps the important position that gave rise to this conjecture, and to others of a similar complexion, “that the propriety of allegorical composition made the distinguished pride of ancient poetry,” is as questionable as the conjecture itself; and a diligent and judicious perusal of the ancient Poets might convince us, that simplicity was their genuine character, and that many of their allegorical beauties have originated in the fertile imagination of their commentators. Aristarchus, indeed, the celebrated model of ancient criticism, rejected with great spirit the allegorical interpretations of Homer, as we are informed by Eusthathius; but the good Archbishop of Thessalonica, who, like some modern prelates, had a passion for allegory, censures the great Critic of
Alexandria

Alexandria for his more simple mode of construction, and supposes it an injury to the refined beauties and profound wisdom of the Poet.

Ἄρισταρχος μεντοι μηδεν τι των Ὀμηρων . . .
αλληγορεῖν αξίων, & μονον υπερβολικον τι λεγει,
αλλα και σοφιας μεγαλης αφαιρειται τον ποιη-
την.

EUSTH. vol. iii. page 1300.

Having considered in this note some conjectures on Virgil, that appear to me fantastical and ill founded, I am tempted to produce two illustrations of the same great poet, which, if I am not deceived by friendship, reflect more light and honour on the first of the Roman poets. At all events, they will be esteemed as a literary curiosity by the reader, when I tell him they were written by a Critic, whose name is doubly entitled to respect in the republic of letters, from his own taste and erudition, and from the poetical genius of his daughter.—In the early part of his life, Mr. Seward of Lichfield had thoughts of publishing a translation of Virgil in blank verse. Among his remarks on different passages of his

author, the two following appeared to me particularly happy; and I transcribe them from the papers of my worthy old friend, in the persuasion that every lover of Virgil will peruse them with pleasure.

“ THERE are two passages in the *Æneid*, which seem to me misunderstood by all the commentators and translators, from the age of the Roman classics to the present; and yet, when properly explained, they will, I hope, appear beautiful, clear, and almost indisputable. I shall mention them as they occurred to me. The first of these lines is in the eighth book of the *Æneid*, verse 695. It is in the prophetic description of the battle of Actium, between Augustus and Antony, carved by Vulcan on the shield of *Æneas*:

— Arva novâ Neptunia cæde rubescunt.
Regina in mediis patrio vocat agmina sistro;
Necdum etiam geminos a tergo respicit angues:
Omnigenûmque deûm monstra, et latrator
Anubis,

Contra

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Contra Neptunum, et Venerem, contraque
Minervam,

Tela tenent : sævit medio in certamine Mavors
Cælatus ferro, tristefque ex æthere Diræ ;
Et scissâ gaudens vadit Discordia pallâ,
Quam cum sanguineo sequitur Bellona flagello.

The difficulty in this passage is, to know what and where the two prophetic snakes were behind Cleopatra's back. Most commentators say that they were carved upon her shield, which hung upon her back ; but surely this could not be designed by Virgil : if he meant to represent Cleopatra in armour, as he undoubtedly did, he would not have hung her shield behind her back in the hour of battle. In the next place, why does he give her two serpents, when both her sculptors, painters, and historians give her only *one*, the bite of which, in that country of venomous creatures, was quite sufficient to slay her. Nor would Virgil, the model of perspicuity, express himself so confusedly, as to talk of her

turning her eyes to what is carved upon her own back. If the reader is convinced that the passage wants perspicuity, he will be pleased to find the whole cleared up, by observing, that the two snakes were on the *caduceus* of *Anubis*, which consisted of a *dog's head* on a human figure, with a *caduceus* in one hand, on the top of which were two beautifully curling asps or snakes, and a purse or a porridge pot in his left (*Le Pluche*)—from whence the Greeks, perhaps, without knowing the meaning of this emblem, took their *Mercury*. They discarded the *dog's head*, as unsightly, and placed a human one in its stead; by which they destroyed the emblematic figures, though they left the name of *latrator*, or *barker*, sufficient to lead us to its real meaning; which was, that of the *dog-star*, the rising of which just preceded the *overflow of the Nile*. As soon, therefore, as the astronomers of Egypt could discern the *dog-star* risen in the spring, they gave notice of it by their *Anubis*, or *dog*, which was hung out on their several towers, that
all

all the people might fly to their terraces and places of safety : but if clouds had before obstructed the view of the star, and it was risen high before it was discerned, they added wings to his feet and shoulders, put his caduceus in his right hand, and a porridge pot, or purse, in his left, to hurry the people in their preparations against the deluge. Virgil therefore, in describing Cleopatra in her ship, evidently supposes the name of her ship to have been *Anubis* ; whose image was carved on the poop of it, holding his *caduceus* behind Cleopatra. The rest of the Egyptian fleet having “*omnigenûm deûm monstra,*” other Egyptian deities, on their poops, who

Contra Neptunum, et Venerem, contraque
Minervam,

Tela tenent : —

that is, the *Egyptian* ships and *Roman* were ranged in battle against each other.

Cana

Cana fides, et Vesta, Remo cum fratre Quirinus,

Jura dabunt :—— *ÆNEID I. ver. 292.*

Scarce any passage in Virgil has given me greater trouble, took longer time, or gave me greater pleasure in the discovery, than this. The difficulty was, to know how Virgil came to chuse Romulus and Remus, the one the murderer of the other, as the joint legislators of a new golden age of peace and prosperity. Much historical knowledge has been in vain applied to form many strange interpretations, with which the Critics themselves are plainly dissatisfied: much the most plausible is that of Ruæus, that "*Cana Fides*" was the ancient faith of citizens to each other; *Vesta*, religion; and *Romulus* and *Remus*, the power of the *Princes* united as legislators. But how a *Fratricide* could represent such an union would be strange indeed.—I will not detain the reader with enumerating the many absurd conjectures of interpretation, but shall only mention some facts relating to a new solution. First, this book of Virgil was evidently written soon after

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the battle of *Actium*, when, Antony being subdued, the whole world seemed at peace, and Augustus shut the gate of Janus. Mecænas was his favourite Minister and Prætor Urbanus ; and had just then, with wonderful sagacity, discovered and suppressed a conspiracy against the Emperor's life, on his return in triumph to Rome. One of the principal actors in this conspiracy, was the son of the late Triumvir Lepidus ; whom, with several other conspirators, he had, unknown each to the other, seized, imprisoned, and privately destroyed, without any noise or public disturbance. The knowledge of this recent fact makes it still more surprising, that Virgil, who is full of compliments to his patron in most of his other works, should, in his principal poem, totally omit speaking of him ; unless he is supposed to have represented him by the character of "fidus Achates," which amounts to no more than that of lighting a fire to dry their clothes and their corn after a storm, or to bring Ascanius to his father to partake of Dido's entertainment. I hope to prove that Virgil's

gil's supposed neglect of his friend is not true, and that he is, in the line above, elegantly and judiciously complimented; as also very intelligibly so, to all who knew the history of this conspiracy, and that Mecænas was Prætor Urbanus, with a power equal, if not superior, to our Lord Chief Justice and our Lord Chancellor conjoined. It occurred to me, many years before I knew any proof of it, that "Cana Fides, et Vesta, et Remo cum fratre Quirinus," were the names of those temples where Mecænas held his beds of justice; in the same manner as, in the former note, "Anubis" and "Deorum monstra" were only the names of the Egyptian ships opposed to those of the Romans, named Mercury, Venus, and Minerva. I had many years a strong suspicion of this, when, accidentally reading Horace's Epistle, "*Ibam fortè viâ sacrâ,*" I found that the temple of Vesta was employed by Mecænas for trials of civil causes. See Sat. IX. Book I.—Having therefore found my conjecture, with regard to the temple of Vesta, verified, I pursued my search to the others, viz.

of

of Romulus and Remus, and of Fides. The first I found to be the place of trial and punishment of criminals; and the next to be the temple where the tablets of all the *Senatûs Consulta* were hung up, and which in Cæsar's time were so numerous, that the walls of the temple could not contain them, and therefore an additional building was erected: this, therefore, seems extremely proper to accompany the seats of judicature. The compliment to Mecænas, is this: When civil wars shall cease, and all power, regal, consular, and tribunitial, centre in Augustus, his friend and favourite, Mecænas, shall be Prætor Urbanus; who shall rule by the equitable laws suspended in the ancient temple of Fides, shall decide civil causes in the temple and grove of Vesta, and criminal ones in the temple of Romulus and Remus *. All this would be clearly understood by those, who knew the ample powers conferred on Mecænas by his judicial office of Prætor Urbanus."

* The foundation walls of which still remain, and on them is built a modern temple, dedicated to two brother saints.—*Roma Antica*.

NOTE VI. VERSE 260.

Shall History's pen, to aid his vengeance won.]

There is hardly any eminent personage of antiquity, who has suffered more from detraction, both in his literary and moral character, than the poet Lucan. His fate, indeed, seems in all points to have been peculiarly severe. His early death, at an age when few Poets have even laid the foundation of their capital work, is itself sufficient to excite our compassion and regret ; but to perish by the envious tyranny of Nero may be considered as a blessing, when compared with the more cruel misfortune of being branded with infamy in the immortal pages of Tacitus. As I am persuaded that the great Historian has inadvertently adopted the grossest calumny against our Poet, I shall most readily assign my reasons for thinking so. It may first be proper to give a short sketch of Lucan's life.—¹ was the son of Anneus Mela, the youngest brother of Seneca ;
and,

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and, though born at Corduba, was conveyed to Rome at the age of eight months: a circumstance, as his more indulgent critics observe, which sufficiently refutes the censure of those who consider his language as provincial. At Rome he was educated under the Stoic Cornutus, so warmly celebrated by his disciple Persius the Satirist, who was the intimate friend of our Poet. In the close of his education, Lucan is said to have passed some time at Athens. On his return to Rome he rose to the office of Quæstor, before he had attained the legal age. He was afterwards inrolled among the Augurs; and married a lady of noble birth, of whose amiable character I shall speak more at large in a subsequent note. Lucan had for some time been admitted to familiarity with Nero, when the Emperor chose to contend for poetical honours, by the public recital of a poem he had composed on Niobe; and some verses of this imperial production are supposed to be preserved in the First Satire of Persius. Lucan had the hardiness to repeat a poem

on Orpheus, in competition with that of Nero ; and, what is more remarkable, the judges of the contest were just and bold enough to decide against the Emperor. From hence Nero became the persecutor of his successful rival, and forbade him to produce any poetry in public. The well-known conspiracy of Piso against the tyrant soon followed ; and Tacitus, with his usual sarcastic severity, concludes that Lucan engaged in the enterprize from the poetical injuries he had received : a remark which does little credit to the candour of the Historian ; who might have found a much nobler, and I will add a more probable, motive for his conduct, in the generous ardour of his character, and his passionate adoration of freedom. In the sequel of his narration, Tacitus alledges a charge against our Poet, which, if it were true, must lead us to detest him as the most abject of mankind. The Historian asserts, that Lucan, when accused of the conspiracy, for some time denied the charge ; but, corrupted at last by a promise of impunity, and desirous to atone for
the

the tardiness of his confession, accused his mother Atilla as his accomplice. This circumstance is so improbable in itself, and so little consonant to the general character of Lucan, that some writers have treated it with contempt, as a calumny invented by Nero to vilify the object of his envious abhorrence. But the name of Tacitus has given such an air of authority to the story, that it may seem to deserve a more serious discussion, particularly as there are two subsequent events related by the same Historian, which have a tendency to invalidate the accusation so injurious to our Poet. The events I mean are, the fate of Annæus, and the escape of Atilla, the two parents of Lucan. The former died in consequence of an accusation brought against him, after the death of his son, by Fabius Romanus, who had been intimate with Lucan, and forged some letters in his name, with the design of proving his father concerned in the conspiracy. These letters were produced to Nero, who sent them to Annæus, from an eager desire, says Tacitus, to get pos-

fession of his wealth. From this fact two in-
 ferences may be drawn, according to the differ-
 ent lights in which it may be considered:—If
 the accusation against Annæus was just, it is clear
 that Lucan had not betrayed his father, and he
 appears the less likely to have endangered by his
 confession the life of a parent, to whom he owed
 a still tenderer regard:—If Annæus was not in-
 volved in the conspiracy; and merely put to death
 by Nero for the sake of his treasure, we may the
 more readily believe, that the tyrant who mur-
 dered the father from avarice, might calumniate
 the son from envy. But the escape of Atilla
 affords us the strongest reason to conclude that
 Lucan was perfectly innocent of the abject and
 unnatural treachery, of which Tacitus has sup-
 posed him guilty. Had the Poet really named his
 mother as his accomplice, would the vindictive
 and sanguinary Nero have spared the life of a wo-
 man, whose family he detested, particularly when
 other females were put to death for their share in
 the conspiracy? That Atilla was not in that

number, the Historian himself informs us in the following remarkable sentence, *Atilla mater Annæi Lucani, sine absolutione, sine supplicio, difsimulata*; thus translated by Gordon: "The information against Atilla, the mother of Lucan, was dissembled; and, without being cleared, she escaped unpunished."

The preceding remarks will, I hope, vindicate to every candid mind the honour of our Poet; whose firmness and intrepidity of character are indeed very forcibly displayed in that picture of his death which Tacitus himself has given us. I shall present it to the English reader in the words of Gordon: — Lucan, "while his blood issued in streams, perceiving his feet and hands to grow cold and stiffen, and life to retire by little and little to the extremities, while his heart was still beating with vital warmth, and his faculties nowise impaired, recollected some lines of his own, which described a wounded soldier expiring in a manner that resembled this. The lines themselves he rehearsed; and they were the last words he

ever uttered." The Annals of Tacitus, Book xv.—The critics differ concerning the verses of the Pharfalia which the author quoted in so memorable a manner. I shall transcribe the two passages he is supposed to have repeated, and only add that Lipsius contends for the latter.

Sanguis erant lacrymæ : quæcunque foramina
novit

Humor, ab his largus manat cruor : ora re-
dundant,

Et patulæ nares : sudor rubet : omnia plenis

Membra fluunt venis : totum est pro vulnere
corpus.

Lib. ix. 814.

Now the warm blood at once, from every part,
Ran purple poison down, and drain'd the faint-
ing heart.

Blood falls for tears ; and o'er his mournful face
The ruddy drops their tainted passage trace.

Where'er the liquid juices find a way,
There streams of blood, there crimson rivers stray.

His

SECOND EPISTLE. 213

His mouth and gushing nostrils pour a flood,
And e'en the pores ouze out the trickling blood;
In the red deluge all the parts lie drown'd,
And the whole body seems one bleeding wound.

ROWE.

*Scinditur avulsus ; nec sicut vulnere sanguis
Emicuit lentus ; ruptis cadit undique venis,
Discursusque animæ, diversa in membra meatis,
Interceptus aquis. Lib. iii. v. 638.*

No single wound the gaping rupture seems,
Where trickling crimson wells in slender streams;
But, from an op'ning horrible and wide,
A thousand vessels pour the bursting tide :
At once the winding channel's course was broke,
Where wand'ring life her mazy journey took ;
At once the currents all forgot their way,
And lost their purple in the azure sea.

ROWE.

Such was the death of Lucan, before he had

P 3

completed

completed his twenty-seventh year. If his character as a man has been injured by the Historian, his poetical reputation has been treated not less injuriously by the Critics. Quintilian, by a frivolous distinction, disputes his title to be classed among the Poets ; and Scaliger says, with a brutality of language disgraceful only to himself, that he seems rather to *bark* than to *sing*. But these insults may appear amply compensated, when we remember, that in the most polished nations of modern Europe the most elevated and poetic spirits have been his warmest admirers ; that in France he was idolized by Corneille, and in England translated by Rowe.—The severest censures on Lucan have proceeded from those who have unfairly compared his language to that of Virgil : but how unjust and absurd is such a comparison ! it is comparing an uneven block of porphyry, taken rough from the quarry, to the most beautiful superficies of polished marble. How differently should we think of Virgil as a poet, if we possessed only the verses which he

wrote

wrote at that period of life when Lucan composed his *Pharfalia* ! In the disposition of his subject, in the propriety and elegance of diction, he is undoubtedly far inferior to Virgil : but if we attend to the bold originality of his design, and to the vigour of his sentiments ; if we consider the *Pharfalia* as the rapid and uncorrected sketch of a young poet, executed in an age when the spirit of his countrymen was broken, and their taste in literature corrupted, it may justly be esteemed as one of the most noble and most wonderful productions of the human mind.

NOTE VII. VERSE 293.

As Lesbos paid to Pompey's lovely Wife.] Pompey, after his defeat at *Pharfalia*, proceeded to Lesbos, as he had left his wife Cornelia to the protection of that island ; which received the unfortunate hero with a sublime generosity. The Lesbians entreated him to remain amongst them, and promised to defend him. Pompey expressed

his gratitude for their fidelity, but declined the offer, and embarked with Cornelia. The concern of this gallant people on the departure of their amiable guest is thus described by Lucan :

———— dixit ; mœstamque carinæ
 Imposuit comitem. Cunctos mutare putares
 Tellurem patriæque solum : sic litore toto
 Plangitur, infestæ tenduntur in æthera dextræ ;
 Pompeiūque minus, cujus fortuna dolorem
 Moverat, ast illam, quam toto tempore belli
 Ut civem videre suam, discedere cernens
 Ingemuit populus ; quam vix, si castra mariti
 Victoris peteret, ficcis dimittere matres
 Jam poterant oculis : tanto devinxit amore
 Hos pudor, hos probitas, castique modestia
 vultus. Lib. viii. v. 146.

He ceas'd ; and to the ship his partner bore,
 While loud complainings fill the sounding shore ;
 It seem'd as if the nation with her pass'd,
 And banishment had laid their island waste.

Their

SECOND EPISTLE. 217

Their second sorrows they to Pompey give;
 For her as for their citizen they grieve:
 E'en though glad victory had call'd her thence,
 And her Lord's bidding been the just pretence,
 The Lesbian matrons had in tears been drown'd,
 And brought her weeping to their wat'ry bound:
 So was she lov'd, so winning was her grace,
 Such lowly sweetness dwelt upon her face.

Rowe.

NOTE VIII. VERSE 296.

Let Argentaria on your canvass shine.] Polla Argentaria was the daughter of a Roman Senator, and the wife of Lucan. She is said to have transcribed and corrected the three first books of the *Pharsalia*, after the death of her husband. It is much to be regretted that we possess not the poem which he wrote on the merits of this amiable and accomplished woman; but her name is immortalized by two surviving Poets of that age. The
 veneration

veneration which she paid to the memory of her husband, is recorded by Martial; and more poetically described in that pleasing and elegant little production of Statius, *Genethliacon Lucani*, a poem which I the more readily commend, as I may be thought by some readers unjust towards its author, in omitting to celebrate his *Thebaid*. I confess, indeed, the miscellaneous poems of Statius appear to me his most valuable work: in most of these there is much imagination and sentiment, in harmonious and spirited verse. The little poem which I have mentioned, on the anniversary of Lucan's birth, is said to have been written at the request of Argentaria. The Author, after invoking the poetical deities to attend the ceremony, touches with great delicacy and spirit on the compositions of Lucan's childhood, which are lost, and the *Pharsalia*, the production of his early youth; he then pays a short compliment to the beauty and talents of Argentaria, laments the cruel fate which deprived her so im-

maturely

SECOND EPISTLE. 219

maturity of domestic happiness ; and concludes with the following address to the shade of Lucan :

At tu, seu rapidum poli per axem
 Famæ curribus arduis levatus,
 Qua surgunt animæ potentiores,
 Terras despicias, et sepulchra rides :
 Seu pacis meritum nemus reclusæ
 Felix Elysiis tenes in oris,
 Quo Pharsalica turba congregatur ;
 Et te nobile carmen insonantem
 Pompeii comitantur et Catones :
 Tu magna facer et superbus umbra
 Nescis Tartaron, et procul nocentum
 Audis verbera, pallidumque visa
 Matris lampade respicis Neronem.
 Adfis lucidus ; et vocante Polla
 Unum, quæso, diem deos silentum
 Exores ; solet hoc patere limen
 Ad nuptas redeuntibus maritis.
 Hæc te non thiasis procax dolosis
 Falsi numinis induit figuras ;

Ipsum

Ipsum sed colit, et frequentat ipsum
 Imis altius insitum medullis ;
 Ac solatia vana subministrat
 Vultus, qui simili notatus auro
 Stratis prænitet, excubatque somno
 Securæ. Procul hinc abite mortes ;
 Hæc vitæ genitalis est origo ;
 Cedat luctus atrox, genisque manent
 Jam dulces lacrymæ, dolorque festus
 Quicquid fleverat ante nunc adoret.

But you, O! whether to the skies
 On Fame's triumphant car you rise,
 (Where mightier souls new life assume)
 And mock the confines of the tomb ;
 Or whether in Elysium blest
 You grace the groves of sacred rest,
 Where the Pharsalian heroes dwell ;
 And, as you strike your Epic shell,
 The Pompeys and the Catos throng
 To catch the animating song ;

Of

Of Tartarus the dread controul
Binds not your high and hallow'd soul ;
Distant you hear that wailing coast,
And see the guilty Nero's ghost
Grow pale with anguish and affright,
His mother flashing on his sight.

Be present to your Polla's vows,
While to your honour'd name she bows !
One day let your entreaties gain
From those who rule the shadowy train !
Their gates have op'd to bless a wife,
And given a husband back to life.
In you the tender Fair invites
No fancied god with frantic rites ;
You are the object of her prayers,
You in her inmost heart she bears :
And, stamp'd on mimic gold, your head
Adorns the faithful mourner's bed,
And soothes her eyes before they close,
The guardian of her chaste repose.

Away with all funeral state !
From hence his nobler life we date :

Let

Let Mourning change the pang severe
To fond Devotion's grateful tear !
And festal grief, its anguish o'er,
What it lamented, now adore !

I cannot close this note without observing, that the preceding verses have a strong tendency to prove, that Lucan was perfectly innocent in regard to the accusation which I have examined before. Had he been really guilty of basely endangering the life of his mother, it is not probable that his wife would have honoured his memory with such enthusiastic veneration, or that Statius, in verses designed to do him honour, would have alluded to *the mother of Nero*. The Reader will pardon my recurring to this subject, as it is pleasing to make use of every argument which may remove so odious and unjust a stain from a manly and exalted character.

END OF THE THIRD VOLUME.

